

# american PHOTO



**PLUS**  
'BOYHOOD'  
IN PICTURES  
JUSTIN FANTL  
LIVING LATINO  
HELEN LEVITT  
BRYAN DERBALLA  
CLASSIC COVERS  
CAROLYN DRAKE

## MARK SELIGER

*The portrait master on  
30 years of photographing  
our culture's greatest icons*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN  
BY MARK SELIGER

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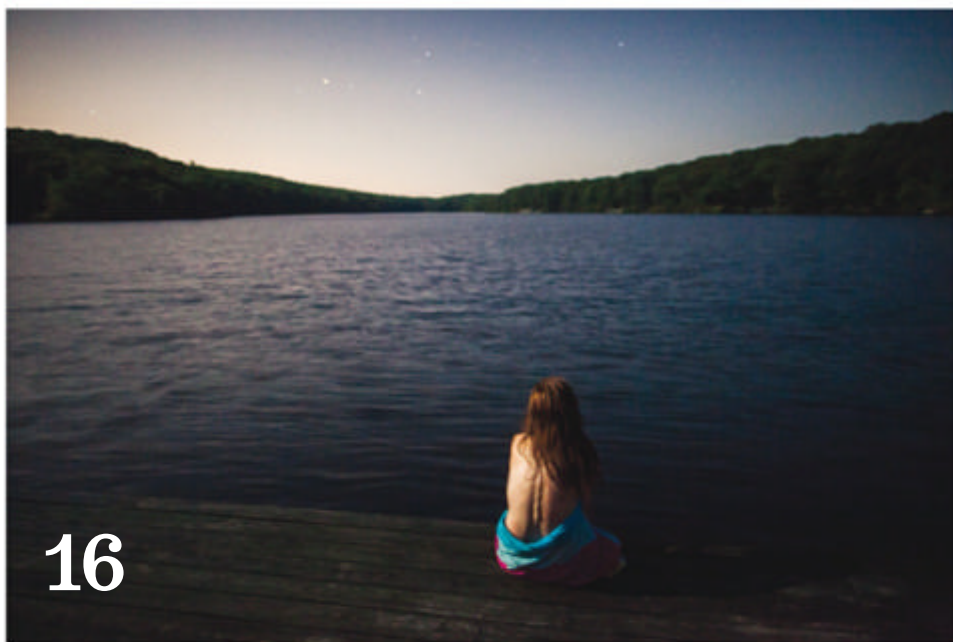




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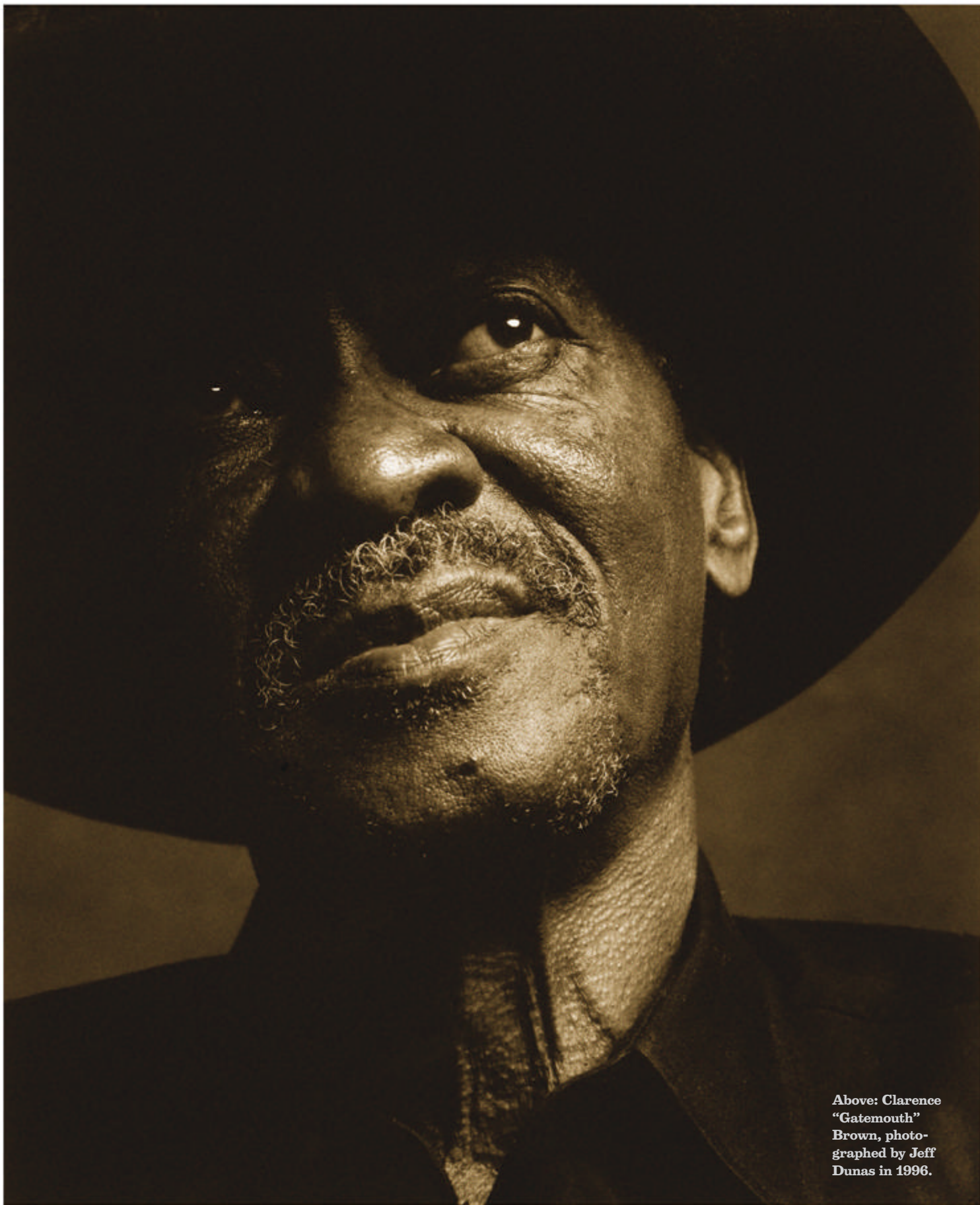


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Above: Clarence  
"Gatemouth"  
Brown, photo-  
graphed by Jeff  
Dunas in 1996.

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# Play On

**O**f the many mysteries in photography culture, one question seized my attention recently: Why are so many photographers really into music, and conversely so many musicians really into photography? For an answer I called my friend Jeff Dunas, probably the most plugged-in photographer I've ever met. His collection of gorgeous musician portraits, *State of the Blues*, was published by Aperture in 2005.

"Music and photography go hand in hand," he said. "A third component is actually red wine."

After we stopped laughing, he continued: "We photographers create the visual aspect of the music, so we're playing a pivotal role."

It's true: Photographers are directly responsible for the rock iconography of the past half-century, and many of those shooters still live off their archives. Now that well is largely dry, in part because musicians and the apparatus that surrounds them restrict access. "You got to spend a lot of time with those guys back then. Today, you get three songs in the front of the house," Dunas says.

In this issue we focus on music photographers of then and now. Our cover story (page 44) profiles Mark Seliger, whose tenure at *Rolling Stone* launched a tremendous 30-year (and counting) career. We chat with Lauren Dukoff (page 34), whose intimate portraits bring an old-school aesthetic to new artists. And on page 58, pros offer tips for getting your best shots at live shows.

*American Photo* will also be going live, as it were, April 26 through May 1 for the Palm Springs Photo Festival. Dunas created this gathering in the Southern California oasis in response to what he saw as the all-too-rare opportunities for photographers from across the spectrum of art and commerce to get together for networking and camaraderie.

For six days he will preside over a heady mix of seminars, panel discussions, portfolio reviews, slide-show presentations, and in-depth workshops with master photographers. Mary Ellen Mark, Dan Winters, Andrea Modica, Jock Sturges, Ron Haviv, and Mark Seliger will teach hands-on, small-group workshops. As a sponsor, *AP* will provide scholarships for emerging photographers, and I'll be there for one-on-one portfolio reviews.

"This festival grew to be a summit. It's all about really serious, really high-end photography," Dunas says. "For one week, there's nowhere you'd rather be." Bring on the red wine—I can't wait!

*Miriam Leuchter*

MIRIAM LEUCHTER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



# american PHOTO

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# Focus

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PICS WORK IN PROGRESS 16 BOOKS 20 ON THE WALL 22



ONE TO WATCH

## Double Vision

Justin Fantl brings a sense of adventure and exactitude to scenes both created and found **BY LINDSAY COMSTOCK**

**T**o simply describe Justin Fantl's imagery as clean, geometric, or playful—adjectives he often hears—would be accurate enough, says the Los Angeles-based photogra-

**Above: "Gold," shot by Fantl for a Cisco Systems campaign created by Goodby Silverstein & Partners.**

pher. Yet to do so might box his work into a single aesthetic—a proposition he rejects. In Fantl's view, constructed still lifes and natural vistas mingle. His graphically charged indoor images incorporate



**Above: “Red Rocks,” from Fantl’s personal project on uninhabitable environments.**

candy-colored geometric planes whose clean lines and vibrant hues bring inanimate objects to life. His grand outdoor landscapes are carefully composed to appear as if just discovered.

Fantl thrives on the balance between chance and control. He traces the start of his career path to a “serendipitous” encounter, he says, with a photographer, “the coolest cool guy I had ever met, with the coolest job I had ever heard of” while traveling on a bus in India during a semester abroad in his junior year of college. “That encounter planted a seed,” Fantl recalls. “I think the decision to really commit myself to photography was momentous.”

A decade later, his client list includes such heavy hitters as Google, Levi’s, Nike, *Time*, *Wired*, and *The New York Times Magazine*. While he’s often hired with the directive to just do his thing, his track record suggests that his work is neither ordinary nor easy to pin down.

What keeps editorial and commercial clients knocking on Fantl’s door may be his unbridled sense of experimentation. He was recently commissioned by Levi’s to shoot the product as he saw it, which resulted in an abstract, geometric

perspective on the iconic jeans—a visual offshoot of other commissioned and personal projects in which he manipulates colorful paper and explores their shapes and shadows. He shuns categorization, seeking simply to remain honest to his artistic muse. Today his vision encompasses surrealistic studio craft and more naturalistic landscapes that echo the graphic symmetry of his constructed scenes.

Why the interest in disparate subject matter? “I think that each area kind of balances out the other,” Fantl says. “I feel some need to work in both genres. After I am intensely in the studio, it feels great to get out and work on the landscapes, and vice versa.” Whatever their stylistic similarities and variations, he says he doesn’t make “conscious distinctions” between the two bodies of work. “They sort of inform each other,” he says.

His parallel processes do seem to diverge, however, in the level of control he exercises over his subjects. In the studio, it’s a limitless world of possibility and a “blank canvas with lots of control,” while outside, “I have to let go a bit,” Fantl says. “I think that what I am often looking for outside is a





**Left: “Wing of Mosquito,”** an image from *Specere*, a series for a forthcoming book depicting slide specimens purchased on eBay. **Below: “Soccer in Fog,”** from Fantl’s personal work shot in Iceland.

feeling. That aspect is, in ways, the same as shooting still life. There is just a different way of going about it. Inside you have to create it and outside you have to find it, but either way you have to recognize what you’re after.” Taken together, Fantl’s work suggests a design-driven approach, using narrative, lines, and color fields to bring order to worlds both imagined and found.

Though his career arc began in college, Fantl says it was easy to take an interest in photography at a young age because there were always cameras lying around his childhood home in Hanover, New Hampshire. He approached the medium as an artist, dabbling with it in high school and undergrad classes, then became more intently focused while studying for an MFA at the Academy of Art in San Francisco. Soon after, he was taken under the umbrella of Giant Artists, a collective that represents up-and-coming photographers, illustrators, videographers, and stylists. This enabled him to



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Perspectives of power



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start shooting on his own without the common step of assisting other photographers.

"In some ways I wish I had assisted, because I had to learn so much on my own," Fantl says. "At the same time, I think that has contributed to finding my own style. I didn't really have a role model or someone telling me this is how you do this, or this is how do you that."

For inspiration and continuing education, he reads "a lot of books on design, art, architecture," he says. "I wander around galleries and museums—just take things in. But I also think it's important to shut that off and look inward. I make a conscious choice from time to time not to look at what other artists have done or are doing. I believe this exercise is just as important as being aware of what else is out there."

Fantl derives special satisfaction from creatively challenging assignment work. In a recent job for *Time*'s 2014 "Genius" issue, he was thrilled to shoot "truly cutting-edge and groundbreaking technology" such as the Hendro Hoverboard and the Apple Watch. "It is an issue I have always enjoyed and have wanted to shoot," he marvels, "one of those little dream-come-true assignments." Similarly, he's been tapped to shoot visionary products for *Wired*'s "Designlife" issue and a futuristic ad campaign for Android Wear, Google's line of watchlike devices.

Whatever the setting, Fantl considers the actual craft of photography a labor of love. "I have realized more and more that what inspires me is a simple work ethic," he notes. "I think the inspiration really comes from doing the work—forging ahead with blinders on and just producing and not quitting." **AP**



From left: "COS," part of a cosmetic test done with stylist Laurie Raab; "Comme," an experiment in shapes and shadows made with paper squares.

## CLOSE-UP

### Justin Fantl

[justinfantl.com](http://justinfantl.com)

Lives In Los Angeles, CA

Studied At Union College, Schenectady, NY (BA in English); Academy of Art, San Francisco (MFA in photography)

Awards Include Gold Medal, Society of Publication Designers Feature, Still Life, 2014; PDN 30, 2011; APA Best in Still Life, 2011; Communication Arts Photo Annual, 2011, 2010

Clients Include Anomaly, Autodesk, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, Cisco, *Fast Company*, Goodby Silverstein & Partners, Google, *GQ*, *More*, *The New York Times*, Nike, Old Spice, *Popular Mechanics*, *Scientific American*, *Time*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Wired*

Influences Berenice Abbott, Andreas Gursky, Stephen Shore, Taryn Simon, Thomas Struth, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Larry Sultan

In the Bag Hasselblad H5D-50c DSLR; Hasselblad lenses (HC 35mm f/3.5, HC 80mm f/2.8, HC Macro 120mm-II f/4). "My lighting is dependent per project and can get very complex," he says, "but I often end up using a trusty Mole Richardson 2K."

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# On the Edge

Bryan Derballa plays on the threshold between ambition and abandon **BY JACK CRAGER**

**I**n early 2007, a 24-year-old Bryan Derballa arrived in New York City with little cash and big ideas. “I flew into La Guardia with two suitcases, a skateboard, and a backpack, and I took a bus and subway from the airport,” he recalls. “On the stairs I’d take one heavy bag, then go back and get the other one, doing these shuttles every 20 feet. Finally this 6-foot-2 Puerto Rican transgender gal came up and said, ‘Honey, you look like you need some help!’ She got me to my friends’ house where I was staying. It was a great welcome to New York.”

Thus kicked off the latest of Derballa’s grand adventures. At age 18 he trekked from his hometown of Asheville, North Carolina, to the University of California at Berkeley with his sights set more on pro skateboarding than studying. But he graduated and continued traveling—in New Zealand, Egypt, Thailand, Europe—and started a blog, [lovebryan.com](http://lovebryan.com),



**From top:** Alli and Amanda watch fireworks during a night swim, 2013; Brett at Coney Island after a polar dip, Christmas Eve 2012. **Opposite:** Phil marks territory with a smoke bomb in a forest in Pennsylvania, 2013.

to document and share his journeys (often financed by odd jobs like bike messengering and delivering food). Later, inspired by pro photographer friends including Mike Belleme and Victor J. Blue, Derballa bought a Canon EOS 5D and caught a serious photography bug.

After moving to Brooklyn, he dove into the highly competitive freelance-photo market. “In New





## CLOSE-UP

### Bryan Derballa

bryanderballa.com

lovebryan.com

Lives In Brooklyn, NY

Studied At University of California at Berkeley (English)

Clients Include *AARP Bulletin*, Adidas, *The Fader*, *Financial Times*, G-Shock, *Huck*, JanSport, J-Crew, K-Swiss, Levi's, Nike, *Rolling Stone*, *Vice*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Wired*

Influences Terrence Malick, Thomas Prior, Paolo Pellegrin  
In the Bag Canon EOS 5D Mark III; Canon EF lenses (24mm f/1.4L II USM, 35mm f/1.4L USM, 50mm f/1.2L USM, 135mm f/2L USM); Jawbone Big Jambox, lots of fireworks

York, seeing all that hustle—seeing how hard people went for it—was a big reality check,” he recalls. “So I decided I was going to do something to advance my career every day, whether it was shooting assignments, working on personal projects, promotions, meetings, mailers, editing images, updating the web-site—every single day needed to be dedicated.”

The work paid off. Derballa built up a commercial and editorial client list including *The Wall Street Journal*, *Rolling Stone*, *Wired*, J. Crew, and Nike. But he developed an unfamiliar affliction: workaholism.

“I wouldn’t allow myself to take any time off,” he says. “Then one weekend in 2010, some friends invited me on a camping trip to this abandoned summer camp on a lake upstate. I had to pass up an assignment—which killed at the time, because that

was money—but I went, and it was incredible! It was the closest to the freedom that I enjoyed when I was growing up, which as an adult I’d left behind. All of a sudden I was reclaiming it. And now I had a means of capture: I had my camera and I knew how to use it.”

Derballa began an ongoing photo series, *Before We Land*, to convey what he calls the “liminal state between youth and adulthood.” Joined by a few dozen cohorts in their mid-twenties to early forties, the 32-year-old photographer plays the role of tour manager and documentarian on frequent camping-and-swimming weekends to nearby locales such as eastern Pennsylvania and the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens. “When we go on a trip, a lot of kids are taking pictures, and everyone’s got their own style for it,” he says. “Lots of vernacular photography. But I think I’m the one who continues to cull it all together, tries to develop it as a larger body of work, and thinks about, ‘Why is this picture important?’ I try to bring the same sort of ethic that I use for my assignments to the shot. But then as soon as I get the photo, I’ll put the camera away and jump in. I’m a participant/observer.”

In both visual style and coming-of-age subject matter, Derballa’s series recalls the work of antecedents such as Mike Brodie—who evocatively captured life riding the rails in *A Period of Juvenile Prosperity*—and Ryan McGinley, whose delineation of footloose youth culture has achieved art-world respectability. “Visually, they’ve both been influences,” Derballa says. “Brodie’s





From top: A gang of friends dogpile in the sand after a night swim at the beach in Queens in the summer of 2013; wind whips Maria's hair over her face at Fort Tilden in September 2013.

images are beautiful and he really captures the sub-culture. And I love the fine-art value that Ryan brings to it, where it's like a document of youth that he looks at often in abstract ways. But because I come from a photojournalist background, everything you see in this series is real—nothing is staged. I might say, 'Hey, you're going to jump off that? Hold on, let me get my camera.' But I don't direct the action, which Ryan often does, using his subjects as models to express ideas."

Derballa's goal with *Before We Land* is to preserve memories of transcendent experiences, to capture moments "when responsibility and recklessness collide," he says. "It's that transition from adolescence to adulthood. In a lot of ways I've made it. I have ridiculously responsible habits. I don't drink, never have. I have an accountant and a healthy IRA, I'm about ready to buy a home, the career is cooking, I have an agent, I have a lot of these markers of, 'You made it in the adult world.'"

"But I haven't given up that other stuff," he adds. "I recently learned how to do a gainer—running forward to do a backflip off a cliff. And I was going into a meeting with art buyers at a big ad agency, and I should be thinking about how to present myself and show my portfolio—but all I'm thinking about is the motion of throwing that knee back to get that backflip! It's that visceral feeling, like skateboarding, of putting yourself in danger but achieving something." **AP**





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# Time Passages

A new photo book traces the long and winding journey of a pioneering film

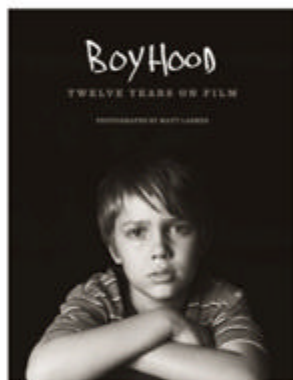
BY JACK CRAGER

## BOYHOOD: TWELVE YEARS ON FILM

Photos by Matt Lankes University of Texas Press \$50

A hit with both critics and audiences, Richard Linklater's Oscar-nominated movie *Boyhood* derives much of its depth and magic from the transformation of its main characters over a dozen years, which the director painstakingly captured by filming vignettes at various intervals. Linklater also had the foresight to invite photographer Matt Lankes along for the entire ride. The resulting volume combines pensive, 4x5 black-and-white portraits of the actors with more candid color documentation on set and behind the scenes.

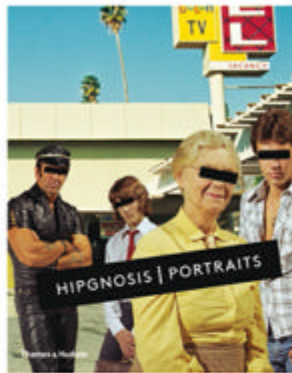
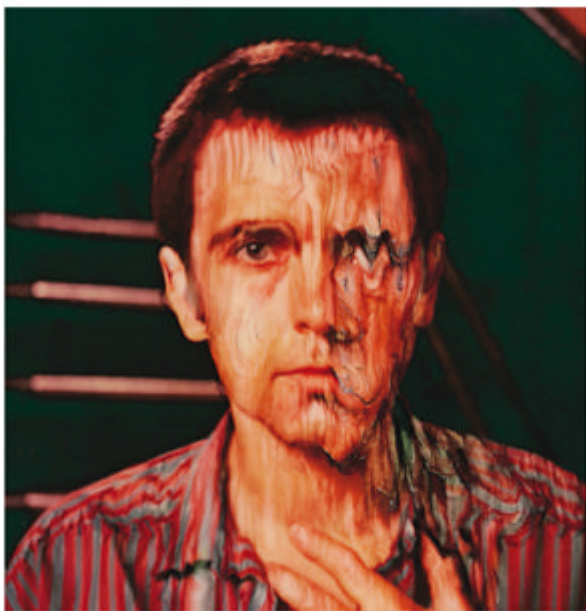
The book is set apart by its elegant presentation. In the film, we see the four major characters—Mason (Ellar Coltrane), mom Olivia (Patricia Arquette), dad Mason Sr. (Ethan Hawke), and sister Samantha (Linklater's own daughter Lorelei)—physically morph in segments, subtle shifts in the movie's progression that reveal changes in familiar faces, not unlike what one notices when visiting out-of-town relatives after a year or two away. The



Top: A composite of time-lapsed portraits of Ellar Coltrane, star of *Boyhood*, Richard Linklater's movie about growing up in Texas.

book is more ordered, with each of the four getting his or her own chapter and timelines noted in the captions. As in the movie, this work benefits from the performers' charisma and authenticity; Linklater lucked out to find a child actor as mature as Coltrane and supporting cast members who more than hold their own. Not to mention delightful side characters including musicians Charlie Sexton and the Austin Steamers—all duly photographed here.

The text calls out telling lines from the film's script—"I'll never love Mommy as much for making us move," young Samantha declares—and they neatly offer insights into the characters. But we don't get much here about the actors themselves, aside from the main quartet's self-penned intro texts (which are fascinating, especially Arquette's and Hawke's). The behind-the-scenes chapters likewise refer to the project, making this very much a book about a film: If you've seen only one, you'll want to check out the other.



## HIPGNOSIS: PORTRAITS

By Aubrey Powell Thames & Hudson \$60

In the vinyl-LP era, British design firm Hipgnosis epitomized enigmatic album-cover art for rock artists ranging from Led Zeppelin to Peter Gabriel (left) to AC/DC (the book's cover shot). Cofounders Storm Thorgeson and Aubrey Powell started out creating artwork for their friends in Pink Floyd; their early psychedelic experiments later gave way to photo-driven designs with a surreal edge (a turning point was Floyd's 1970 album *Atom Heart Mother*, whose cover inexplicably depicted a pudgy cow). Pre-Photoshop, Hipgnosis pioneered double-

exposure and montage techniques to turn photos into "Wow, dude!" moments, as detailed in this memoir's text by Powell, who went on to create music videos and films after the firm's 1982 demise (Thorgeson passed away in 2013). Along the way, Hipgnosis compiled a hefty file of music portraiture—clients range from the Rolling Stones to Olivia Newton-John—much of it unseen until now.



## PLAYGROUND

By James Mollison Aperture \$50

In previous projects ranging from closeups of apes to group shots of superfans at rock concerts, Mollison managed to highlight individuality within swaths of sameness, revealing layers of insight through studies in detail. This series continues the trend, depicting schoolchildren romping on

playgrounds around the globe, from the wilds of Kenya to the cramped modernity of Japan (left)—their garb and environs varying widely, unbridled energy their common thread. Further inspection of these 60-plus images reveals a nearly universal tendency toward combat—"little flashes of violence and cruelty," as Jon Ronson notes in his humorous but sobering intro. This is offset by the joy on display, as Mollison's writes: "The sheer excitement of it. The lesson ends. And you just *explode* out into the playground, and you're just *running*..."



## OUTSIDE THE STUDIO

By Greg Gorman Damiani \$50

Best known for elegant celebrity and commercial portraiture, Gorman takes it to the streets here, documenting scenes in Asian lands including China, India, and Cambodia. He writes in his intro that the title is

"more accurately, 'outside my comfort zone.'" Drawing on his roots as a photojournalist, Gorman shoots primarily impoverished people he encountered during travels in Southeast Asia as a speaker and an exponent of digital printing technologies. Though made by an outsider, these black-and-white portraits reflect a reassuring sense of warmth and humanity, enhanced by Gorman's artistic eye.

From top: Hipgnosis's 1980 *Peter Gabriel* cover, whose melting effect was created by manipulating Polaroid emulsion before it dried; Mollison's "Shohei Elementary School, Tokyo"; Gorman's "Beggar Child, Mumbai."





# Self-Dramatization

In a group exhibition, the art of the portrait meets the realms of theater and fiction

BY TEMA STAUFFER

## **PORTRAITURE NOW: STAGING THE SELF**

National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C., through April 12  
[nationalportraitgallery.org](http://nationalportraitgallery.org)

Now in its ninth installation, NPG's *Portraiture Now* series spotlights innovative contemporary work by six artists, selected by the gallery's new curator of Latino art, Taína Caragol. The mixed-media group show considers the fluidity of identity and the use of theatricality and fiction in portraiture. Among

A portrait in *Staging the Self*: Carlee Fernandez's "Bear Hair Study," 2004.

these works, many of which also combine painting, drawing, or sculpture, photography stands out: Staged photos by Karen Miranda Rivadeneira deconstruct familial traditions and roles recalled from childhood; Rachelle Mozman's enigmatic tableaux raise questions about class, privilege, and power; Maria Martínez-Cañas draws inspiration from her father with merged images of him and herself; and Carlee Fernandez creates self-portraits posing with photographs of important artists and their works.





## MODERN ALCHEMY

The Heckscher Museum of Art,  
Huntington, NY, through Mar. 15  
[heckscher.org](http://heckscher.org)

Subtitled *Experiments in Photography*, this show explores the techniques modern artists use to create photos that belie objective reality—from darkroom tricks and collage to digital manipulation. Artists include Man Ray, Robert Heinecken, Maggie Taylor, and Hiroshi Sugimoto.

Clockwise from top left: Maggie Taylor's "Cloud Sisters," 2001; a Jill Greenberg painting; Helen Levitt's "New York," 1940; Narayan Mahon's "Square, Tiraspol, Transnistria," 2007.



## LANDS IN LIMBO

Madison Museum of Contemporary  
Art, Madison, WI, through Mar. 15  
[mmoca.org](http://mmoca.org)

MMOCA showcases Narayan Mahon's documentary photographs of the human condition in such remote nations as Abkhazia, Northern Cyprus, Transnistria, Nagorno Karabakh, and Somaliland. Mahon's work focuses on social realities, isolation, and economic struggles in the aftermath of war and political strife.

## HELEN LEVITT: IN THE STREET

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA,  
through May 31 [high.org](http://high.org)

Best known for her candid New York City images beginning in the 1930s, Levitt made street photography respectable when her work anchored a pioneering photo exhibition at MoMA in 1939. Over 60 years, she created iconic images of everyday dramas and memorable moments.



## Also Showing



### Jill Greenberg: Paintings

ClampArt Gallery, New York, NY,  
Feb. 19 – Mar. 28 [clampart.com](http://clampart.com)

In a commingling of media, Greenberg photographs her own abstract paintings in oil, acrylic, and gouache on glass—often enhancing the color saturation, texture, and contrast of her captured surfaces through digital camera techniques.

### Alec Soth: Songbook

Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, CA,  
through Mar. 28 [fraenkelgallery.com](http://fraenkelgallery.com)

In this series on community life and rituals across the country, Soth assumes the role of newspaper reporter to portray Americans coming together at meetings, dances, festivals, and gatherings. The show accompanies a new book from Mack.

### Mark Steinmetz: South

Ogden Museum of Southern Art, New Orleans,  
LA, through May 10 [ogdenmuseum.org](http://ogdenmuseum.org)

Atlanta-based photographer Steinmetz's lyrical and emotionally fraught black-and-white images reflect his Southern literary influences, which include William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, and Carson McCullers.

### Teenie Harris: Civil Rights Perspectives

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA,  
through Mar. 31 [cmoa.org](http://cmoa.org)

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, this exhibition features photographs by Charles "Teenie" Harris documenting the turbulence and triumph of the Civil Rights movement from the vantage point of an insider.

### For a New World to Come: Experiments in Japanese Art and Photography, 1968–1979

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX,  
Mar. 8 – July 12 [mfah.org](http://mfah.org)

This major survey examines photography's role in the formation of contemporary art during a period of social and political tumult in Japan. The show and its catalog from MFAH and Yale University Press include the work of 29 pioneers, such as Daido Moriyama, Nobuyoshi Araki, and Hitoshi Noruma.



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**LAYNE KENNEDY**  
GREECE PHOTO  
WORKSHOP

"My mission was to give participants the opportunity to bring home Greece as seen through their own eyes. My personal goal is getting people to learn to photograph what they feel. If you can achieve that, it's an epiphany."

Acclaimed for his dynamic editorial images with a strong sense of place, Layne Kennedy, a Mentor for 8 years, shoots for such publications as Smithsonian, National Geographic Adventure, and Audubon. "The Greece photo workshop was truly awesome," he recalls. "We shot in beautiful settings, from the bustling streets of Athens to the Acropolis and other ancient sites, to the monasteries perched atop the cliffs of Meteora, to the island of Santorini. As mentors, our primary objective is to help you learn to think outside the box visually, get beyond your comfort zone, and create more compelling images. We give you the tools to articulate your vision in a caring and non-competitive environment."



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- Nikon SU-800 Wireless Speedlight Commander
- cable release
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- whistle
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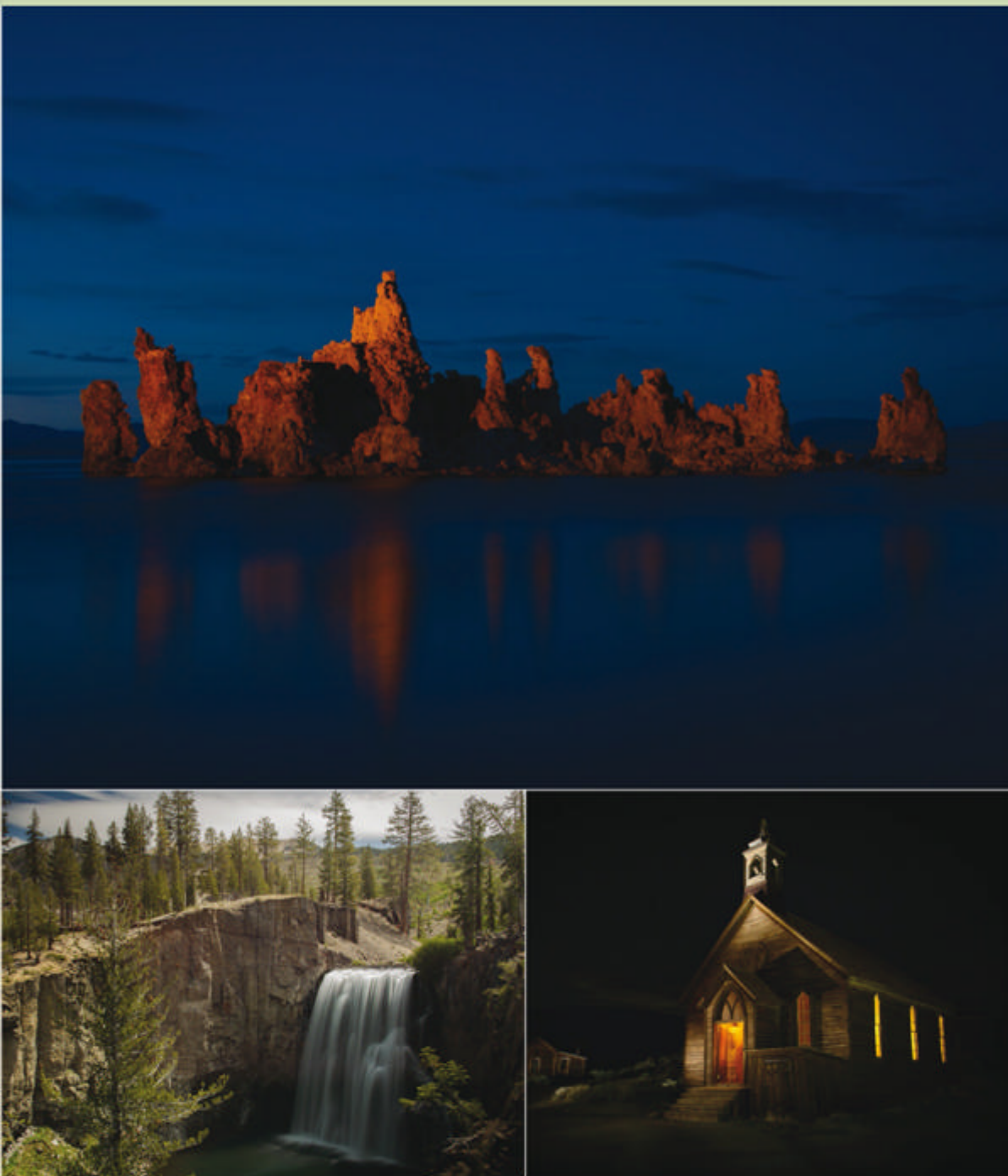
with total-immersion courses in visual expression. Mentored by friendly Nikon pros who share their secrets and practical tips, you'll find yourself shooting your best pictures ever. And you'll have the chance to use the latest high-performance Nikon cameras and NIKKOR lenses, discover spectacular locations, and bring home breathtaking shots. Read on as a handful of these wonderful Mentors describe some of the treks they took in the past year.



**MICHAEL SCHWARZ**  
CALIFORNIA PHOTO  
WORKSHOP

"A Mentor Photo Trek is a great way to spend your time. You're with fellow trekkers, all doing what you love, in the most spectacular places on earth, and learning from accomplished masters of the art."

Prize-winning editorial and corporate photographer and videographer Michael Schwarz has shot over 6,000 assignments in his 30-year career. "The most striking things about the California trek were the phenomenal locations and that we could shoot in the most beautiful light imaginable," he says. "In Bodie, the largest intact ghost town in the U.S., we caught the gorgeous late-afternoon light and got special permission to shoot after dark for light painting. We hiked to Rainbow Falls to capture flowing water at different shutter speeds, and then went to Mono Lake to photograph the tufas in the waning light."



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**BOB SMITH**  
COLORADO  
PHOTO WORKSHOP

"The trekkers learned a lot about using light effectively, but ultimately we're trying to get people to see better, to express their personal vision. It's the hardest thing to teach—and the most fulfilling."

Renowned for his wildlife, environmental, and landscape photography, Bob Smith is a member of National Geographic's Image Collection. "This was an awesome trek, despite the challenging weather," he notes. "We first went to the Garden of the Gods with its vertical sandstone cliffs, where we focused on shooting dramatic landscapes. In Manitou Springs, an old mining town, we photographed the 19th century architecture and then went out to shoot Pueblo ruins against the cliffs. In Idaho Springs we captured a fly fisherman in action, then went to Mt. Evans for the ancient Bristlecone pines and, at 12,000 feet, Summit Lake. We ended in Georgetown, photographing the old buildings and signage. The combination gave trekkers a sense of what created Colorado as it is today."



## INSIDE BOB'S CAMERA BAG

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- AF-S NIKKOR 200-400mm f/4G ED VR II
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**TOM BOL**  
MONTANA PHOTO  
WORKSHOP

"No matter where you are with your photography you're going to learn something new on a Mentor Trek. It's a fun group of people, shooting in spectacular locations and learning a lot about the craft of photography."

Tom Bol, a master of adventure sports photography, gets breathtaking images in demanding conditions. "You couldn't possibly pack more into 5 days than we did in Montana," he asserts. "We started off in Kalispell, where we photographed bears, wolves, and other animals at close range at the Triple D game farm. Then we drove to Browning, near Glacier National Park, for the North American Indian Days, a giant powwow. We combined this with shooting at a spectacular national park. On the last morning we photographed kayakers on Two Medicine Lake, putting into practice all we had learned."



**INSIDE TOM'S CAMERA BAG**

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- Nikon Df
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- AF-S NIKKOR 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6 ED VR
- Nikon SB-900 Speedlight
- Nikon SU-800 Wireless Speedlight Commander

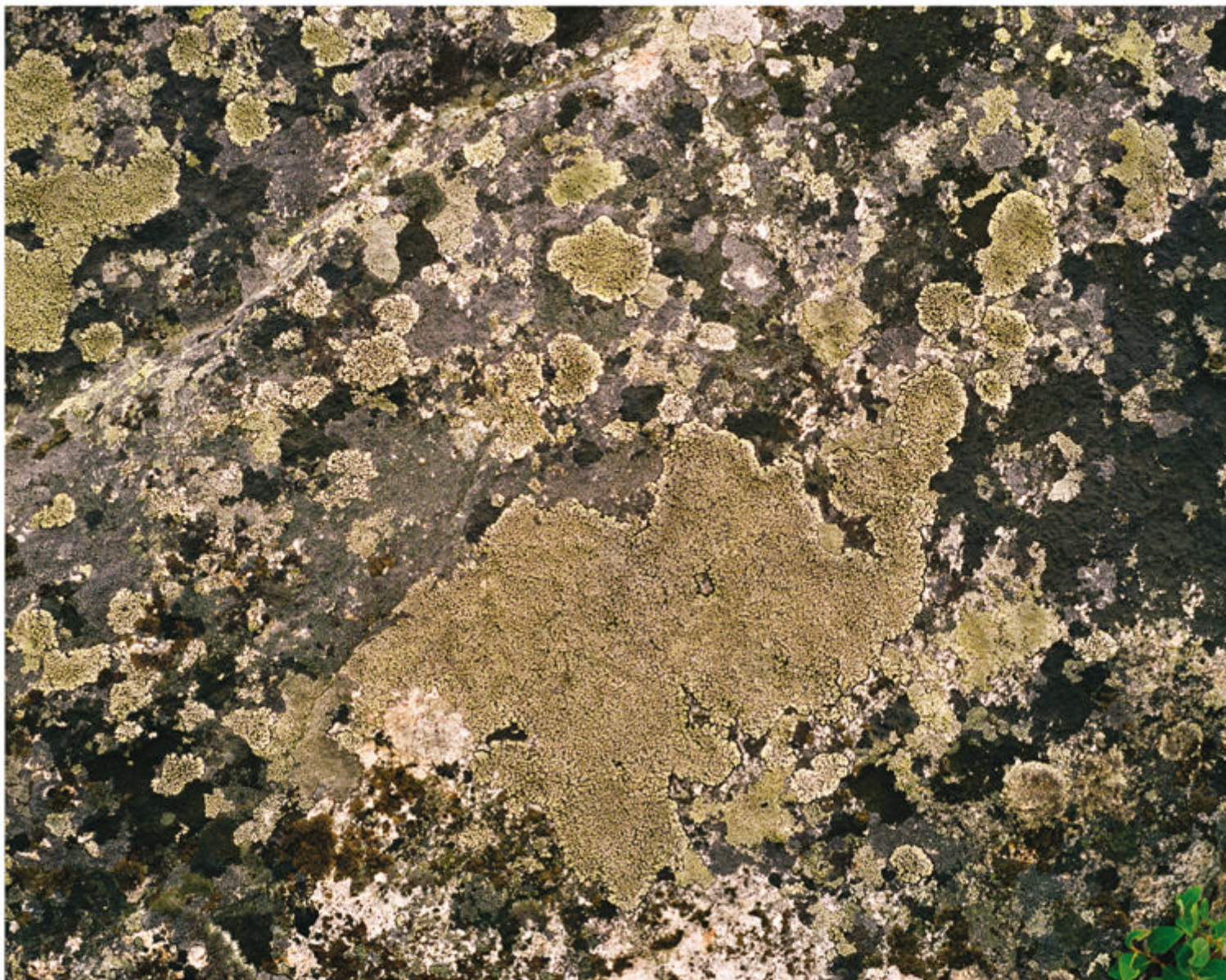
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*Lichen R. Geographicum #0808-04A05 (≈3,000 years old; Aḷanngorsuaq, Greenland)*

# Without a Net

How documenting the world's oldest living things brought adventures in deep time, extreme travel, and the business of art

BY RACHEL SUSSMAN, AS TOLD TO MEG RYAN

**M**y name is Rachel Sussman. I live in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. I am a contemporary artist. That's what I do for a living—no day job, just what sometimes feels like a 24-hour on-call job. Of art. Of arting.

Back in 2004 I took a trip to Japan. I had just finished an artist residency at the Cooper Union, and I had just purchased a new camera (a Mamiya 7ii, which would accompany me around the world and which I still shoot with). I went there without an agenda other than to continue making photographs about the relationship between humanity and nature. I ended up having this incredible adventure to a remote island where, I was told, there was a 7,000-year-

**Above:** Commonly known as map lichen, rhizocarpon geographicum grows approximately 1 cm every 100 years. 13x16-in. archival pigment print, August 2008.





*Dead Huon Pine adjacent to living population segment #1211-3609 (10,500 years old);*

old tree. Once you got to the island, it was a two-day hike to get to the tree. With the help of some people who befriended me on the ferry ride over, I made it to the tree and made some photographs of it, and continued on my way. The lightbulb moment came later.

Long before I visited that tree, I had been interested in developing an art and science project. I came up with many ideas, discarding each when I found them lacking the substance and depth I was looking for. I wanted to make work with some philosophical heft as well, and I kept returning to the concept of deep time—those geologic or cosmic measurements of time that so far outpace our human temporal experience that the mind boggles to contemplate them. Sometime the following year, I was in SoHo having dinner with some friends, and I told them about that trip—that’s when the lightbulb went on. All of the disparate pieces that I’d been thinking about for so long suddenly gelled. *The Oldest Living Things in the World* was born.

Part art, part science, part philosophy, *The Oldest Living Things* evolved into a 10-year-long transdisci-

**Above:** The extreme age of this clonal colony of huon pines in Tasmania was discovered by carbon-dating ancient pollen found at the bottom of a nearby lakebed. 44x54-in. archival pigment print, December 2011.

plinary conceptual art project that has culminated in a set of 125 images of 30 organisms, an exhibition, and a book that’s now been published in several languages. It’s also been my own laboratory in making a living as an artist.

The idea was a simple one: to find and photograph continuously living organisms at least 2,000 years old; in other words, to start at “year zero” and work back from there. Research is a very significant part of the work. There wasn’t a pre-existing list of organisms that qualified aside from a few ancient tree lists, so I began with a lot of broad Google searches, tracked down published scientific research, then reached out to the authors. They were almost always thrilled that someone had found their work, especially someone outside of their field. Some invited me to join them in fieldwork; some sent maps and directions or connected me with local guides.

I soon found out that the world’s oldest living things are not just plants. There are also bacteria, fungi, and, I was surprised to learn, even some





*La Llereta #0308-23B26 (up to 3,000 years old; Atacama Desert, Chile)*



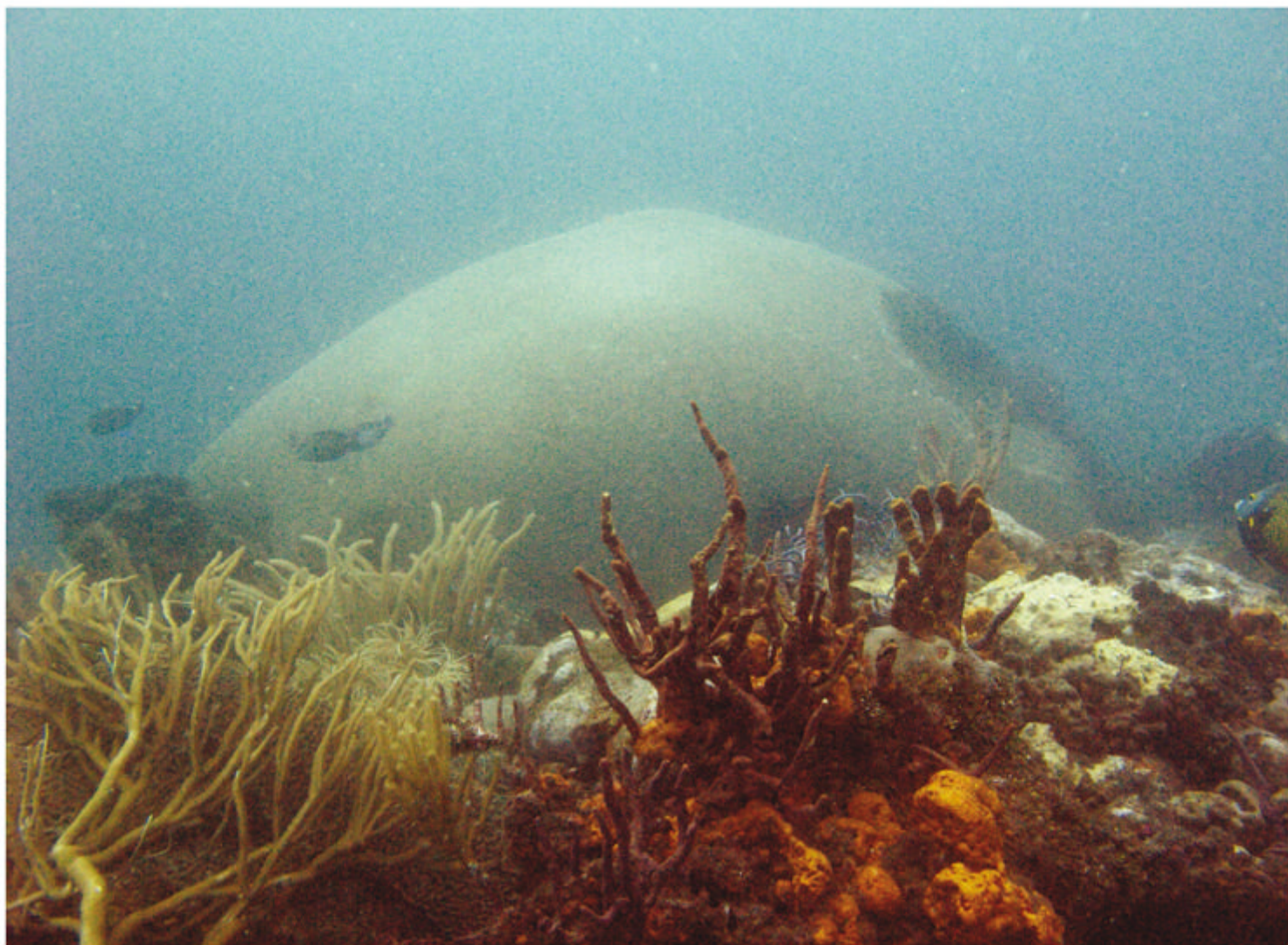
*Stromatolites #1211-0512 (2,000 - 5,000 years old; Cable Station, Western Australia)*

ancient animals (those being corals and sponges). These ancient survivors are spread across the globe. An undertaking of this breadth requires a lot of time, research, legwork, and money.

The book and exhibition include research papers and ephemera, all sorts of things that I collected on my travels—for example, interesting rocks, maps, quirky memorabilia, and x-rays from when I slipped and broke my wrist in Sri Lanka when going to visit a tree there. All are culled from a whole decade's worth of research, travels all over the world, and thousands of negatives. It was important to me to illustrate the layers of the project—some of the messy underbelly, if you will, and not just formal, final images on their own. The photographs themselves, mostly 44x54-inch prints and some smaller-sized editions, are art objects that are one component of this layered work. I approached the photographs of the organisms themselves more as portraits than as landscapes.

Access was another important component of the work. Some of my subjects, especially the ones that people are probably most familiar with, like the giant sequoias, are easy to visit. Most of them are not. Getting to a remote part of Greenland, for instance, to shoot lichens that grow just one centimeter every





*Brain Coral #0210-4540 (2,000 years old; Spuysside, Tobago)*

Above: This brain coral is approximately 18 feet across and lives at a depth of about 60 feet. Corals and sponges are the only animals in this body of work. Opposite, from top: What looks like moss covering rocks is actually llareta, a dense flowering shrub that happens to be a relative of parsley, high in the Atacama Desert in Chile; 44x54-in. archival pigment print, March 2008. Stromatolites are tied to the oxygenation of the planet 3.5 billion years ago; 44x54-in. archival pigment print, December 2011.

100 years, was not easy. Getting to Antarctica was a challenge. Visiting the Kruger National Park game preserve in South Africa, I needed an armed escort just to get out of the Jeep to photograph a baobab tree lest I be eaten by a lion.

Beyond being prepared for natural elements, the other question was what other members of my same species had in store for me. For instance, in Pretoria, South Africa, on my way to photograph the underground forests, there was a warning on the radio about snatch-and-grabs in the area I was headed to, and my host said, "If you're at a red light coming off the exit and you see people approaching you, blow the red light. It's not safe, just go through." Certainly I have always tried to be as respectful and culturally aware as I can be wherever I go, and as a woman often traveling solo, safety is not a non-issue.

None of this work would have seen daylight without funding and support. We live in a very commercial world that relies heavily on the myth of the entrepreneur. As such, artists are expected

to play many roles. I'm my own CEO, accountant, fundraiser, marketer, creative director. I'm doing the advertising, the PR, showing up at parties and (hopefully) being charming. Somewhere in there I'm supposed to be coming up with this great new work, too. Finding a balance is a creative exercise in itself.

And the reality is that often the income art generates—for me that's included art sales, book sales, speaking engagements, and writing—barely pays the bills, much less funds new work. I had to come up with some inventive fundraising tactics. I did a Kickstarter campaign in 2010 after I tried a benefit event. I've bartered for travel immunizations from a tropical medicine doctor. I bartered for dentistry. I've done lots of different things to help—all above board, of course. When you're trying to do something like travel to every continent, that's expensive. Making prints, making the art, is expensive.

Then I got the Guggenheim fellowship. When I found out I think I was laughing and crying simultaneously for about 10 minutes. I had begun





applying when I started *The Oldest Living Things*: Every fall, I would work on my written proposal, take my portfolio over to their offices, and wait. Having to articulate each year what the work meant actually assisted my process and helped me refine how I thought about the work itself. My eighth attempt, in 2014, was finally the charm. That grant enabled me to continue my work, ensured my livelihood for the

next year, and allowed me to proceed with my exhibition at Pioneer Works in Brooklyn—a show that has since moved to Bucknell University’s Samek Museum and will continue to travel.

I’ve also been quite fortunate along the way to receive some wonderful press. Still, just because an artist is getting mainstream exposure doesn’t mean that they’re financially solvent. There have



On campus of NASA's  
Jet Propulsion Laboratory,  
Pasadena, CA, 2014.

been times when I've been the only person in the room not getting paid—providing photographs to a magazine or being a guest on a radio show, for instance. (I'm happy to note that this magazine is compensating me for my work.) Many artists fall prey to the “this is great exposure for you” argument, but I've become a huge proponent of people getting paid for their time and effort.

Unfortunately, we lack an infrastructure conducive to artistic pursuit. Here in the U.S. we have a model for funding the development of scientific research and technologies, sometimes ones that don't yet have applications. There's far less funding for creating art. I'm not saying that everybody who says they're an artist should just get a check in the mail, but too often there's an unproductive feeling of flying without a net. Under constant stress, one's choices become more and more desperate, not more and more thoughtful and creative.

I feel incredibly fortunate to be involved in some of the exceptions, like the MacDowell Colony, the Guggenheim Foundation, and now LACMA Lab. A brainchild of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Lab pairs artists with different tech companies and provides a sort of creative incubator to come up with what you might term “blue-sky” art: There are no limits, no set expectations of a final product. It's just meant to stimulate ideas by getting exposure to these different areas and ways of working. For me that means continuing my look at deep time, now even further back into cosmic time and out into space.

Ultimately, the core of my work with LACMA Lab and on *The Oldest Living Things* is long-term thinking. When we consider the values of the systems in which we live and work in the context of deep time, an ethical question arises. We tend to forget that humanity is only one component of a vast and delicate ecosystem, and that our lives on Earth are a drop in the bucket of a vast swath of time. If we can employ long-term thinking into our everyday lives, how might that change our decisions? I hope that my work can serve as a touchstone for thinking outside ourselves, beyond your own lifetimes and everyday lives. I hope it helps people connect in ways that they wouldn't otherwise. **AP**



*Rachel Sussman is a Guggenheim, NYFA, and MacDowell Colony Fellow and a member of Al Gore's Climate Reality Leadership Corps. Her book, *The Oldest Living Things in the World*, is a New York Times bestseller; her solo exhibition is on view at Bucknell University Samek Museum through March 22.*



# Backstage Pass

Lauren Dukoff has revived the spirit of intimate music reportage with medium-format film—and ignited a hot career as a portrait photographer in the process

BY LINDSAY COMSTOCK

When I caught up with Los Angeles-based photographer Lauren Dukoff, she was having a girls weekend in Palm Springs, California, but that didn't stop her from graciously taking me on a tour through her flourishing photographic career.

Her journey started with a chance teenage friendship with Devendra Banhart, who would later help define a folk music revival. Dukoff's acclaimed book *Family* (Chronicle Books, 2009) documented him and his band of free-spirited collaborators. (Dukoff's name also appears on the credits of a couple of Banhart's albums as a flute player, which produces a burst of laughter when I ask her about it.)

Her intimate reportage photography—reminiscent of an era when music photographers doubled as roadies—has since extended to many musicians, including Beyoncé, Lady Gaga, Mary J. Blige, Katy Perry, Morrissey, and Adele, whom she's followed since a publicity shoot before the release of her debut album, *19*. All this and she just turned 30.

© Lauren Dukoff









**Your work is reminiscent of iconic images taken of Bob Dylan and the Rolling Stones in the 1960s and '70s. Is this intimate style a natural progression of documenting your friends?**

A lot of it was really natural. My father was a cinematographer and director; he gave me my first camera. Growing up in Malibu, I was close friends with Devendra. He became my first subject. It started casually, [with us taking pictures of each other], as teenagers do. As his music career grew, I continued taking pictures in the same way. They were naturally intimate because we were so close. I carried that style throughout my photography.

**Are there iconic music photographers you've admired over the years?**

I love Annie Leibovitz's early work of the Rolling Stones. Her career, from *Rolling Stone* photog-

**Above: Adele performing at Royal Albert Hall, London, 2011.**

rapher to *Vanity Fair* portraitist, has been a big inspiration for me—I just started shooting for *Vanity Fair* this last year and I'm really excited about it! I also love Autumn de Wilde's work. I grew up listening to The Smiths and Morrissey and a lot of the musicians she's photographed, like Elliott Smith and Beck. I was a fan of the music and then a fan of the photography. As a teenager having both of your mediums joined together, it doesn't get any better.

**You assisted de Wilde. How did she inform your style?**

She helped me find value in my work; I got a lot of my education from her. I studied for a year at the Brooks Institute in Santa Barbara, California, and after I left the school I spent about a year feeling disillusioned with photography. Then I started





interning for Autumn. I admire her not just for her photography, which I think is incredible, but for her ability to make her subjects comfortable and make the people she's shooting feel that they are in a safe space. So when I'm shooting, I like to keep it calm. I want people to be able to really be themselves and relax. That gives me the opportunity to get something intimate or different out of my subjects.

**What would you say was your breakout moment as a photographer?**

In 2007 *Rolling Stone* published a photo I'd taken of Devendra in the recording studio. A few weeks later they called and asked me to shoot Mary J. Blige in the recording studio. I was 23, just a naïve kid. I walked in there with the same sort of casual energy that was in the Devendra picture—because I didn't know better.

**Previous spread and above: Adele during the recording of her album *21*, Malibu, CA, 2011. Right: Dukoff's cover for *21*.**







**Where does your success come from?**

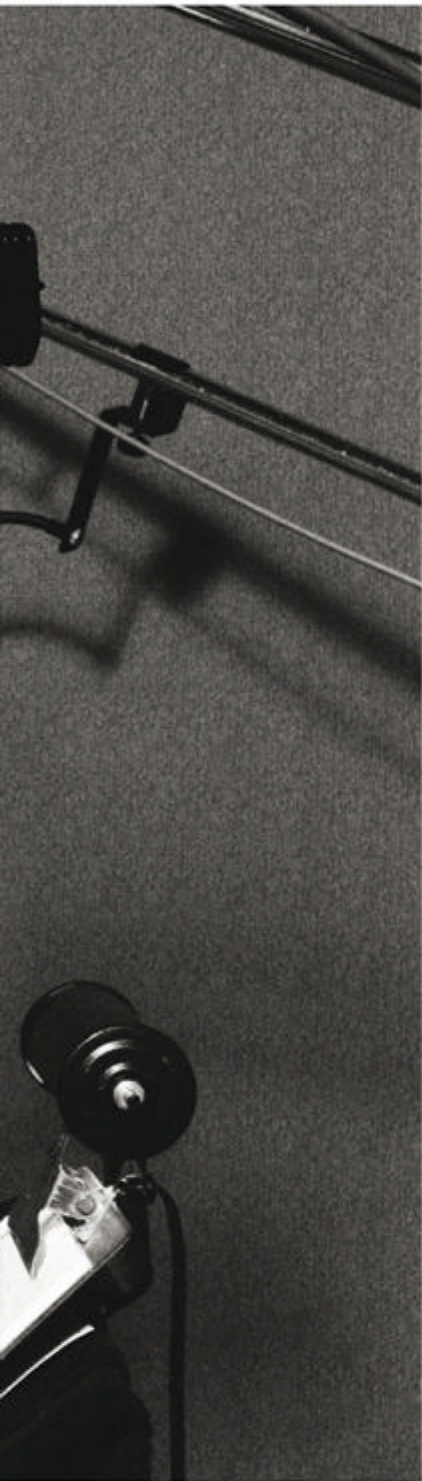
It's hard to say. I feel like you can attribute it to luck or being in the right place. But it's a lot of hard work and a lot of commitment, too. Some of the best advice came from my father. He said, "There will always be people more talented than you out there. But with all the rejection in this industry, they will eventually give up and fall by

**Above: Mary J. Blige in the recording studio, Los Angeles, for *Rolling Stone*, 2007.**

the wayside. If you stay your course, you will succeed." I definitely have had some down moments, but I stuck with it.

Knowing what I wanted to do [at a young age] helped. It had a lot to do with growing up in a creative household (my mother is an incredible cultural guide, and was always taking my brother and me to concerts). Being a photographer was





a legitimate life choice. I was lucky to grow up in that environment. I'm sure in many families photography seems like a fake job, not a realistic goal.

**Do the styles of music that your subjects make influence the way you approach a shoot?**

Absolutely. I think a very good example of that would be Adele's album *21*, which was released in

**Above: Devendra Banhart, 2010.**

2011. I was fortunate enough to be with her in the recording studio a few weeks prior to shooting that record's cover—spending time listening to her write the record and record it, and then documenting that [process], I had such a good understanding of the album. The cover visual successfully connects to the music because I knew so very well where she was coming from.





**Do you always try to develop this kind of rapport with your subjects?**

If there's the opportunity and we like each other, yes [*laughs*].

**What does your kind of photography mean in a world where social media has changed the way celebrities allow us access to their lives?**

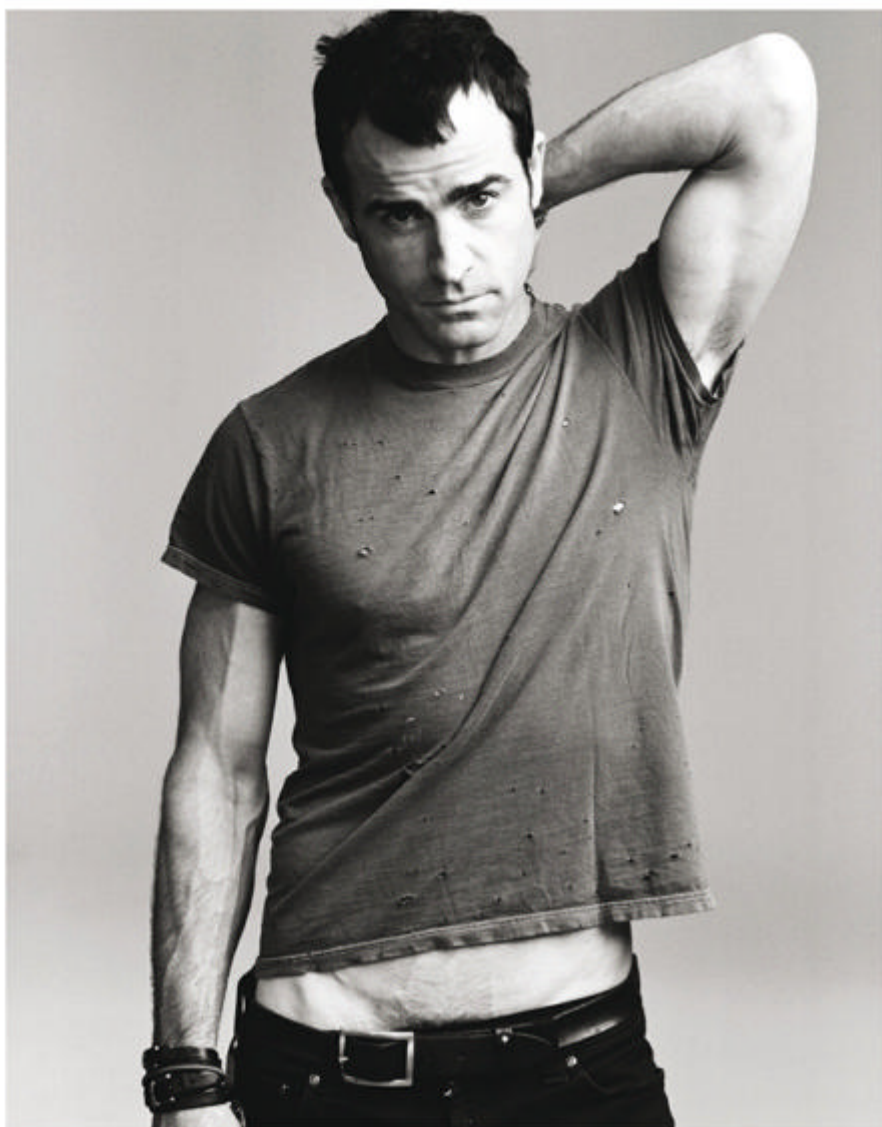
Access was more coveted when people didn't share as much. But there can still be these really special amazing moments for a documentary photographer. Again, I think Adele is a great example, because her career skyrocketed while I was photographing her. Capturing her making the *21* record, the album cover, touring, the 2013 Grammys, and 2013 Academy Awards—I was very aware I was experiencing something special, and it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

**You shoot mainly film.**

I am a medium-format film shooter; I don't really shoot a lot of 35mm. I'm comfortable shooting digital for studio portraits, but as far as my documentary photography goes, I won't shoot digital. That has to

**Above: Devendra Banhart and his band on tour, Camber Sands, England, 2006. Left: Matteah Baim, Malibu, CA, 2007. Both are from *Family*.**





Above: Actor Justin Theroux, 2012. Right: Actress Kate Mara, 2014. Both for *New York* magazine.



be on film for me. It calls back to the old rock and roll photography aesthetic of the film grain and the black and white. I still shoot with a Mamiya 645 and my Mamiya RZ67 with Ilford 3200 film. I stockpiled all that Polaroid 3000 [laughs]. It's an aesthetic, it's a technical choice, and I think it's an emotional choice for me. I love shooting on film.

Also, when you're doing documentary film photography, it slows you down a bit and makes you choose your frames wisely. I get better images if I know I only have 15 frames when a moment is happening. It really makes you focus and make good decisions. The never-ending rapid-fire of digital—I don't know, it kinda makes you lazy.

#### **How do you see music photography evolving?**

The wonderful thing about photography is that our existence in this universe is being documented, and now that documentation has just exponentially increased. I think that's incredible. There are more ways for people to share and fans to see more of their favorite musicians. I think it's a really great thing. But I also think that now there's more of a place for really well curated art books made by photographers or musicians.





**What's next for you?**

I've been shooting a lot more fashion, which is fun. It's something I didn't think I would be interested in. But it's been a real growing experience for me as a photographer—it kind of took me by surprise. I like to think that whether I'm shooting musicians, actors, or models,

it's all about collaborating with creative people. I'll be inspired by someone's music or by a designer's gown, and that will end up affecting my choices and how I approach the shoot—like the lighting I'll use, or how I'll frame the shot, or something else. I let my subject guide me and just see what happens. **AP**

**Above: Musician Binki Shapiro for *Vogue* Japan, 2013.**

© Lauren Dukoff



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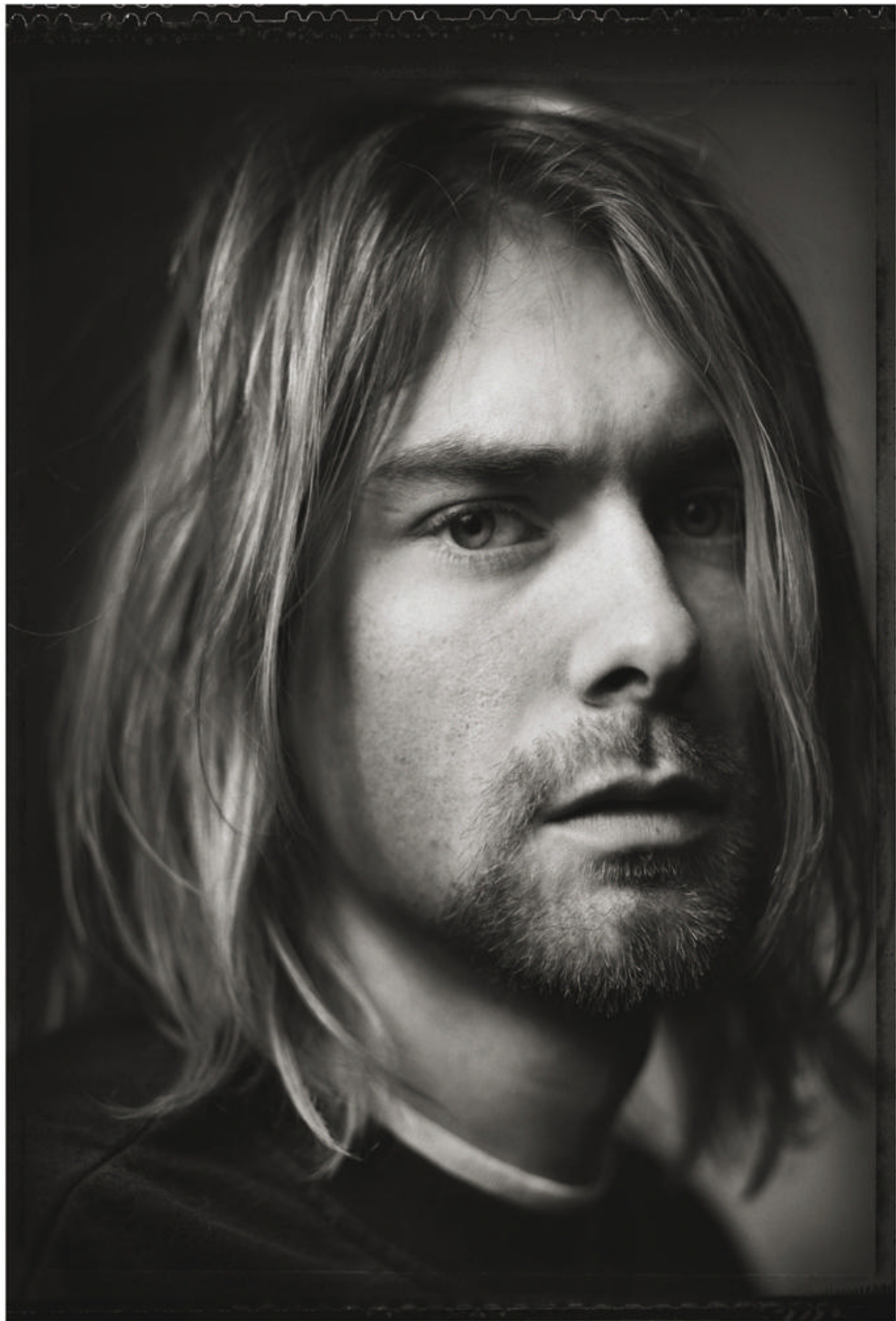
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# *Can't Stop* **Won't** *Stop*

Mark Seliger's relentless pursuit of excellence has made him one of our most successful portraitists. Here's how a kid from Texas became a master. **BY SCOTT ALEXANDER**







**O**n November 4, 1984, Mark Seliger, all long limbs, wide eyes, and 24-year-old energy, arrived in New York City, where he began an extended stay at his brother's place in Brooklyn. "I would get up in the morning, get on the train at 6 a.m., make it into the city, and have a coffee," he says. "Then I'd start plugging dimes into the phone booth." Every dime was a cold call to a photographer. He'd keep at it until one of them agreed to let him come and assist.

Seliger is known for a work ethic that borders on terrifying. His is the kind of intensity that can't be forced—not continuously for 30 years, anyway. And while that kind of drive can only come from inside, it's hard not to see in it echoes of Fred Damon, the photographer Seliger did printing for during and after his senior year in high school. Damon, a veteran of Houston's grip-and-grin circuit, would shoot anything: dinners, industrial work, conventions. If the money was green, he was there.

"Fred was a hard-working photographer in every sense of the word," Seliger says. When the guy wasn't shooting he was talking about shooting. Until 2 a.m. sometimes, when he'd fall asleep in his chair, a lit cigar in his hand. As far as the teenager knew, this was just the way photography got done. "I didn't know there was life outside of what Fred Damon did," he says.

**Previous spread:** Kurt Cobain for *Rolling Stone*, Kalamazoo, MI, 1993.

**Opposite:** Tom Waits for *GQ*, Forestville, CA, 2002. **Below left:** Metallica for *Rolling Stone*, Paris, 1991. **Below right:** Dana Carvey for *Rolling Stone*, Los Angeles, 1993.

Today, Seliger shoots for the world's top culture and fashion magazines. His art pieces hang in galleries, and he is responsible for some of the most iconic celebrity portraits of our time. Look closely and you can see Fred Damon whispering in his ear: *Get out there and do the work. Do it until you fall asleep in your chair. Then get up and do some more.*

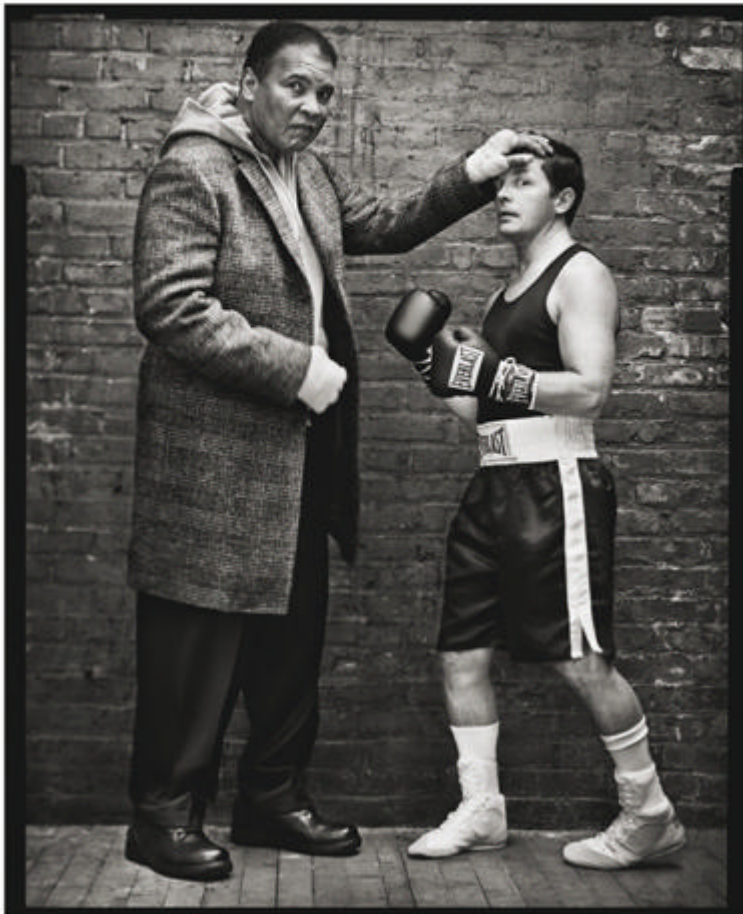
After studying photography in college and a brief stint assisting in Houston, Seliger's horizons remained small. "I thought I was going to stay in Texas and do annual reports," he recalls, figuring he'd creatively satisfy himself with personal side projects in his off hours. He had no idea that the wider world of editorial, fashion, or fine art photography existed.

But as he mastered the local scene, the feeling he was moving in the wrong direction grew. "I was at a dead end," he says. "I didn't know what else to do." When a college friend and a coworker both suggested he go to New York for six months, he figured, why not?

An avalanche of dimes later, Seliger had assisted a crazy-quilt assortment of New York City photographers. Boredom wasn't an issue. "I had a master list, and went and saw whoever would let me," he says. "Everybody from still life to editorial." As they worked, he absorbed every detail. Some were extremely technical. Others emphasized aesthetics







but couldn't set up an umbrella to save their lives. They all had something to show him.

Seliger eventually settled into a long-term assisting gig with John Madere, a corporate and advertising shooter and utter perfectionist. Under Madere, Seliger learned "to be persnickety and particular" as well as how to manage clients and stay on top of billing. "It was much better than grad school," he says of the experience. After a year and a half, however, that old restless feeling crept back in. He was ready to go out on his own.

Daunting though it was, it was time for Seliger to start showing his work. To strengthen his resolve, he eventually stopped assisting completely. It was succeed or starve, and the city didn't seem to care much about which way it went.

Seliger put together a portfolio and began dropping it off at magazines around the city. It was 1986, and he remembers picking up his portfolio from *Avenue* magazine down to the exact wording of the note that came back with it: "We appreciate your consideration for dropping your work off at the magazine, but I don't see a sense of personal style here," he recites from memory. Its sting is still apparent three decades later. "I had to reread that to make sure I understood what I was seeing. Then I went home, ate five chocolate doughnuts, and sat in the corner."

The next day he was back on the train. This time

**Above, from left, all shot in Seliger's West Village, New York City, studio stairwell: Muhammad Ali and Michael J. Fox, 2004; Bill Irwin, 2002; Paul McCartney, 2001; Elvis Costello and Diana Krall, 2003.**

he dropped his book off at *Forbes*, where it found a more receptive audience. "The photo editor sent me the kindest note," he says, something like "I love your work, and you'd be great here." The same afternoon he got it, someone called him with an assignment to shoot an executive from Porsche's U.S. operation.

While the job went well and led to more work for *Forbes* and other business mags, success became a matter of dogged pursuit. "It was not uncommon to have a couple weeks go by where I dropped off my portfolio every day and never heard the phone ring," Seliger says. But he didn't give up. He steadily connected with more and more photo editors, and less than a year after going out on his own, Seliger was making a living from editorial photography. And the mainstream entertainment magazines were beginning to take notice.

"When I found my way into pop culture, it was just an endless sea," Seliger says of this period. "Suddenly I could do everything from music to actors to models, everything you could possibly imagine." And imagine he did. Throughout the late 1980s, Seliger turned in stellar shoot after spectacular shoot, blending pathos with humor and a wellspring of humanity to blaze a trail through the upper ranks of the elite magazine world. Visual consultant Laurie Kratochvil, *Rolling Stone's* director of photography at the time, recalls seeing his portfolio



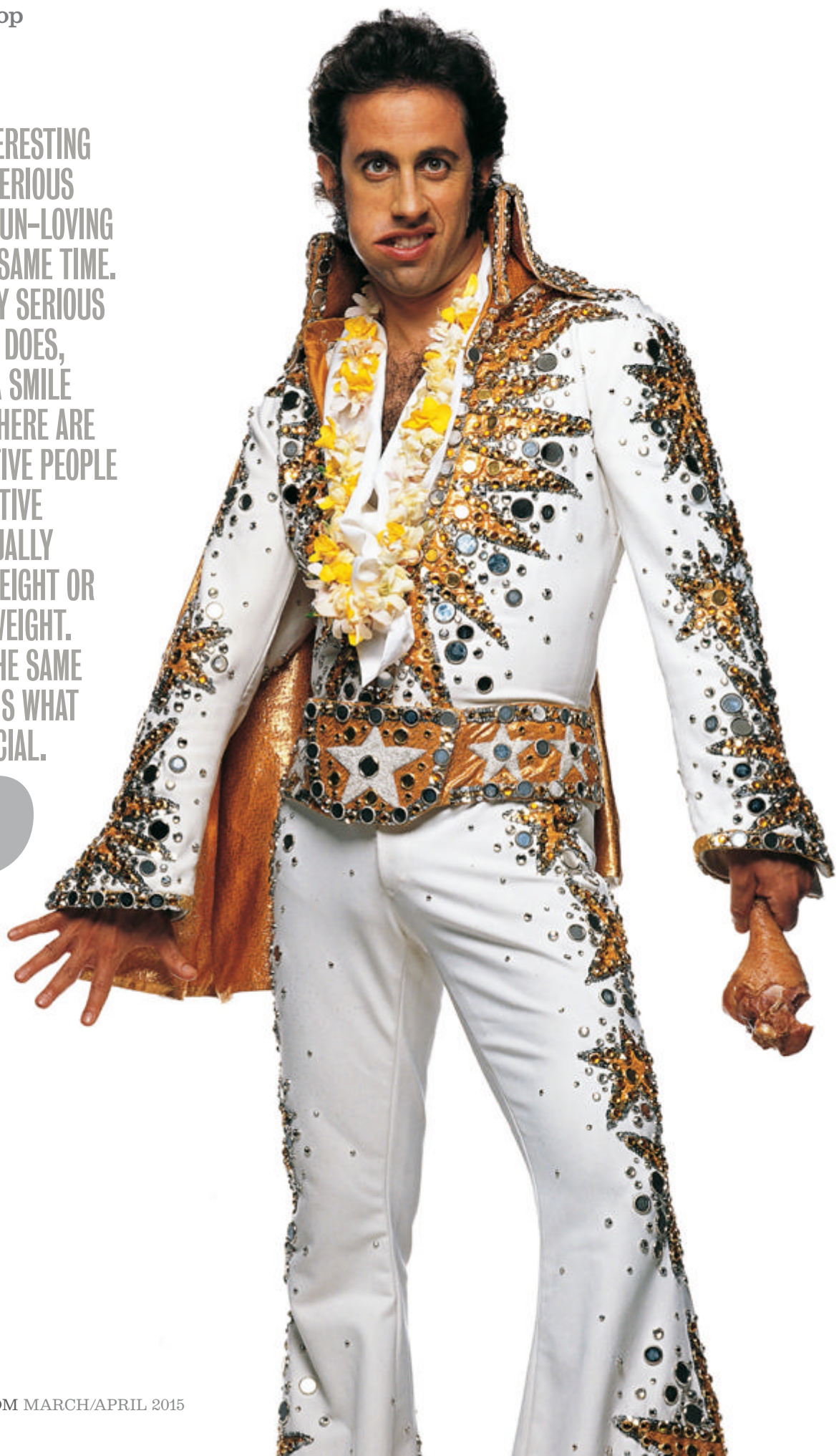
HE BREAKS THROUGH THE NECESSARY WALL THAT CELEBRITIES BUILD BETWEEN THE REAL SIDE OF THEMSELVES AND EVERYONE ELSE. THAT ALLOWS HIM TO GET THE UNGUARDED MOMENTS THAT DEFINE SO MANY OF HIS MOST INTENSE PORTRAITS, AND IT ALSO ALLOWS HIM TO CONNECT AND GET HIS SUBJECTS ON BOARD WHEN HE HAS A CONCEPT IN MIND THAT ASKS SOMETHING OF THEM.

—Krista Prestek, Director of Photography, GQ



IT'S A VERY INTERESTING TRICK TO BE A SERIOUS PERSON AND A FUN-LOVING PERSON AT THE SAME TIME. HE IS EXTREMELY SERIOUS ABOUT WHAT HE DOES, BUT IT'S WITH A SMILE AND A LAUGH. THERE ARE VERY FEW CREATIVE PEOPLE LIKE THAT. CREATIVE PEOPLE ARE USUALLY KIND OF LIGHTWEIGHT OR THEY'RE HEAVYWEIGHT. HE'S BOTH AT THE SAME TIME, AND THAT'S WHAT MAKES HIM SPECIAL.

—Jerry Seinfeld,  
Comedian





after he dropped it off the first time. “I just really enjoyed the way he perceived things,” she recalls. “They seemed spontaneous, not like a forced setup. And they were very well executed technically. Not overlit or overproduced. I said, ‘Hold on to this book. I want to meet this guy.’”

Seliger’s first assignment for Kratochvil demonstrated the meticulousness that was rapidly propelling him to the top of his profession. “When I gave him his first assignment, he did a dress rehearsal,” says Kratochvil. “He did the assignment before he did the assignment! His work ethic was as high as his creative level. It’s very unusual to see that. I think Mark had always wanted to work for *Rolling Stone* and he wasn’t going to let this opportunity escape.”

Over the following five years, Seliger shot more than a dozen *Rolling Stone* covers. The magazine realized this unbroken string of hits was no accident, and in 1992 Seliger was signed to a position as a staff photographer. “When you get a talent like Mark’s you just want to feed it,” says Jann Wenner, the magazine’s founder, editor, and publisher. “You just want to give it opportunities and let it grow.”

**Opposite: Jerry Seinfeld for *Rolling Stone*, Los Angeles, 1994. Below: Steve Martin and Judd Apatow for *Vanity Fair*, Pasadena, CA, 2012.**

When Seliger joined *RS*, his desire to learn continued unabated, and joining the magazine full-time enabled him to turn growth into an art form all its own. His work over the next 10 years put the industry’s collective jaw on the floor in its creative trajectory, sheer proliferation, and impact. The photographer estimates he did at least 100 assignments a year for Wenner Media magazines: *Rolling Stone*, *Us Weekly*, and *Men’s Journal*.

“Rough patches happen to everybody—writers, painters, photographers,” says Jodi Peckman, *Rolling Stone*’s creative director. “But if Mark has them, we don’t know about it.” Peckman accompanied Seliger on many of the shoots during this period. “His technical chops are top notch, but he’s an ideas guy too. It was clear from the very beginning that he was going to be not only a great cover shooter, but a great prolonged cover shooter,” she says. “If you send Mark back to the same subject, he’ll get something new. You can’t do that with too many photographers. From the beginning he had different styles. But somehow they’re cohesive and they work together.”

Indeed, from the beginning Seliger has shown





“WHEN *VANITY FAIR* ASKED ME TO GUEST EDIT ITS COMEDY ISSUE, THE FIRST THING I REQUESTED WAS FOR MARK TO DO ALL THE PHOTOS. I HAD A RIDICULOUSLY FUN FOUR TO FIVE MONTHS WORKING WITH MARK, EXECUTING THESE PHOTOGRAPHS WITH MY FAVORITE COMEDY PEOPLE. AND EVERY ONE OF THEM CAME OUT LIKE I DREAMED IT WOULD. THE PHOTO WE DID OF STEVE MARTIN COMING TO MY HOUSE FOR AN AUTOGRAPH MAY BE MY FAVORITE THING I'VE EVER DONE, INCLUDING THE MOVIES.

—Judd Apatow, Producer/Writer/Director

an uncanny ability to build the ideal shoot for each subject using a mix of highly detailed planning and preparation as well as a willingness to go with the flow on the day of. “He has a way of talking people into things,” says Kratochvil, recalling a shoot with Dana Carvey where Seliger’s idea was to shoot the comedian with a goldfish tail hanging out of his mouth. When Seliger approached Carvey with the idea, the comedian replied, “I’ll do it if you’ll do it.” Seliger didn’t hesitate. And another classic cover was born.

Of course, not every celebrity is ready to eat a goldfish. Or, say, listen to you at all. After a long string of successes, achieved by driving hard at his subjects and controlling so many details of his shoots, Seliger was memorably brought up short while shooting Nirvana in Australia for the band’s first *Rolling Stone* cover. “I found a great location in the back country west of Melbourne,” he recalls. Then, before the shoot Seliger made the mistake of telling the band to please not wear shirts with any writing on them. Famously, Cobain showed up wearing a shirt that read CORPORATE MAGAZINES STILL SUCK, along with a chunky pair of plastic sunglasses.

“I said, ‘Can we take a couple without the shirt and glasses?’” Cobain refused, Seliger says. “He finally did two frames without the glasses, but he crossed his eyes. I was so mad at myself for bringing it up to them. I couldn’t let it go.” However, when he returned with the film, *Rolling Stone* was ecstatic. “I messed up, but the gods smiled on me. They gave me a pass, and the band was open the next time I shot them. The first cover showed a sense of reluctance and irreverence that was the beginning of something. It was the ’90s. It was noise. After that I started to think about artists very differently.

**Opposite, from top:** Diane Kruger for *Italian Vogue*, Théâtre Déjazet, Paris, 2009; Chanel Iman for *German Vogue*, Lancaster, CA, 2009.

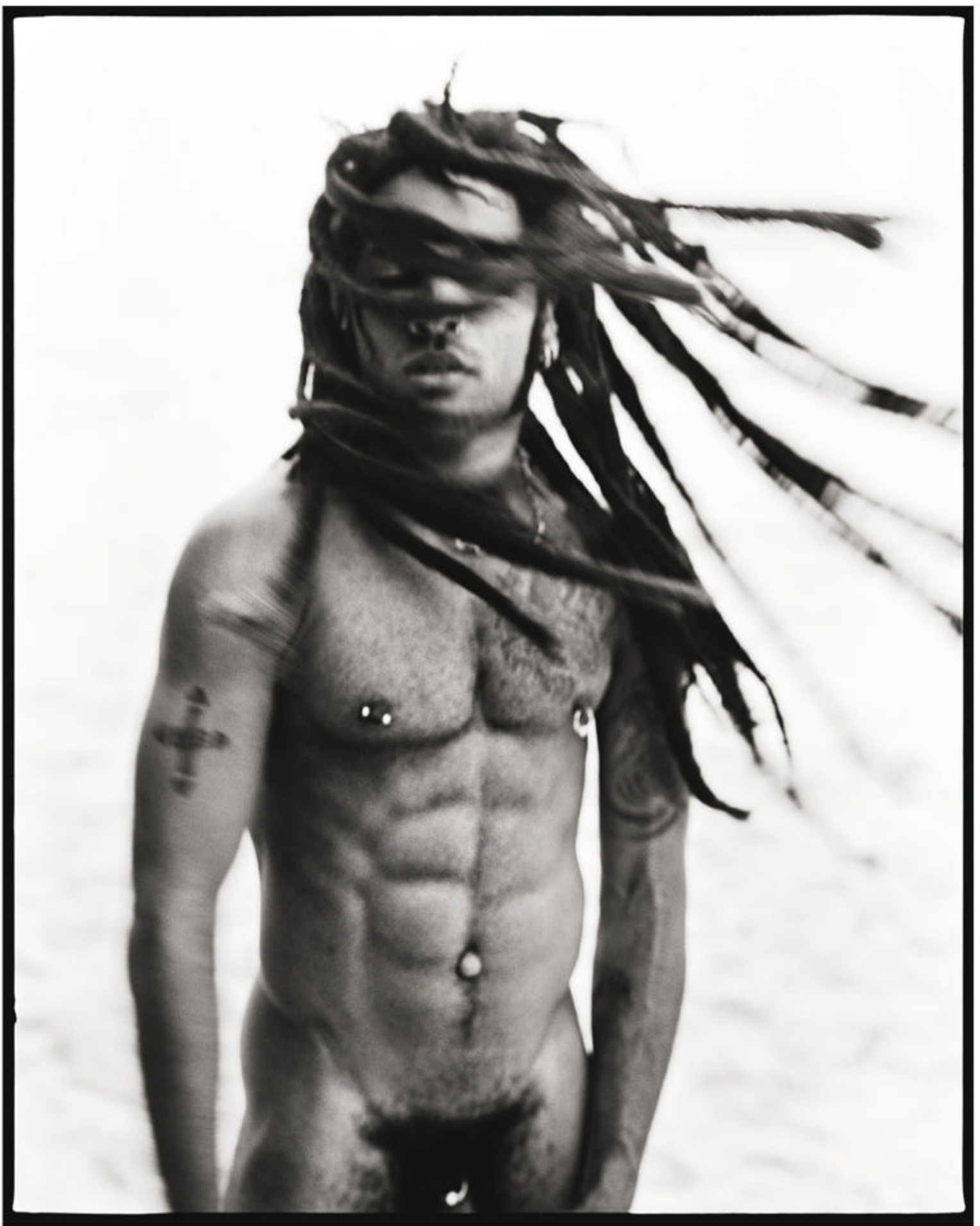
I stopped controlling things as much.”

The gods would smile again, as if to show Seliger he was on the right track. Cobain seemed to appreciate that the photographer hadn’t balked at his shenanigans. The next time Seliger shot the band, after the debut of *In Utero*, the vibe was far more cooperative. In a nod to the previous shoot, Seliger suggested the band wear Brooks Brothers suits for the shoot and they complied. “Then Kurt sat very quietly for me and gave me that Polaroid,” Seliger says, referring to the devastating portrait (page 45) taken just before his death. “There is an honesty and a total melancholy present there. It was a great gift from him and an important lesson for me to learn. That photo was a game changer for me.” While he remained (and remains) meticulous and prepared to a fault, from that point on, collaboration trumped control.

Seliger’s cheekiness didn’t leave completely, of course. He recalls a gamble that paid off during a *Rolling Stone* shoot in 2010 with President Obama. The magazine needed a conventional cover shot, but Seliger also wanted one “to take home” (something he tries for at every shoot). In this case, his heart was set on a photo of both the front and the back of the president’s head. “When you have five hours you can try different things,” he says. But “when you’re shooting the president of the United States in the White House you have six and a half minutes.” Working in front of Obama’s staff, along with Jann Wenner, a couple of writers, and Seliger’s editor, he shot the cover in about five minutes, then grabbed his Pentax and took the president over to a white background he had set up. “I told him I wanted to do a diptych, so I shot a couple frames from the front, then asked him to turn around,” Seliger says. “After about five frames he said, ‘OK, that’s enough









art.” The whole episode took a minute and a half, but the photo may outlive them both.

In 2002 Seliger left his position at *Rolling Stone* and began shooting for other magazines: *Vanity Fair*, *GQ*. He also began shooting more in fashion and advertising. Those who might mistake this for dabbling are directed to the exceptional work he’s been quietly pumping out for German, Italian, and Spanish *Vogue*, Ray-Ban, or Levi’s. Or if you prefer, the movie posters for *Anchorman*, *Superbad*, or *The Interview*. It’s as if, after a couple decades of hitting home runs, he decided he’d show up at the stadium Monday night and throw a few touchdown passes, then drop in at the

Staples Center to start for the Los Angeles Lakers.

Through it all, Seliger’s personal work has remained not only an intense focus for him but has drawn the kind of outside interest and acclaim most photographers only dream of. Any photographer who maintains such a grueling commercial pace could be forgiven if they wanted to leave their day job at the office. But Seliger sees his personal work as key to his continued growth. “Mark is absolutely crazy like that,” says photographer Patrick Randak, Seliger’s former first assistant, of his old boss’s seemingly inexhaustible creative energy. “If it isn’t a book project, it’s a fine art project or Rusty Truck

**Opposite:** Lenny Kravitz for Virgin Records, Nassau, Bahamas, 1998.  
**Above:** Piers, New York, NY, 2007.



A LOT OF WHAT MARK DOES HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH PICTURE TAKING. HE HAS THE ABILITY TO GET ALONG WITH ALL DIFFERENT PERSONALITY TYPES, AND THE ABILITY TO GET IN AND OUT OF DIFFICULT SITUATIONS. NOT EVERYBODY IS GREAT IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA, BUT EVERYONE SEEMS TO BE GREAT IN FRONT OF MARK'S CAMERA.

—Jodi Peckman, Creative Director, Rolling Stone

[Seliger's alt-country band]. The guy goes a mile a minute. There's no rest for the weary."

His monograph *When They Came to Take My Father* was released in 1996 and features Seliger's photographs and narratives from Holocaust survivors. *In My Stairwell* (2005) is a collection of stripped-down portraits of cultural figures and artists that Seliger captured over a period of years in the exposed-brick stairwell of his West Village studio. In 2006 he rented a space in the building next door and built a darkroom so he could experiment with making platinum/palladium prints. Then he started a nonprofit gallery, 401 Projects, in the same space with two collaborators. In 2013 Ovation debuted *Capture With Mark Seliger*, a TV show that pairs pro photographers with celebrities who are also photo enthusiasts and explores their work.

Getting closer to darkroom printing, he says, led directly to his next set of personal work, 2010's book *Listen*. As he explored, he found himself in need of subject matter that would do justice to the tonal depth platinum/palladiums can achieve. Where his portrait work is about high-level planning and high-wire interpersonal work, the landscape, still life, and nude work in *Listen* has more to do with serendipity and patience. "A lot of those photos were about slowing down," he says. "They were about being present and allowing something to come to you rather than you going to it."

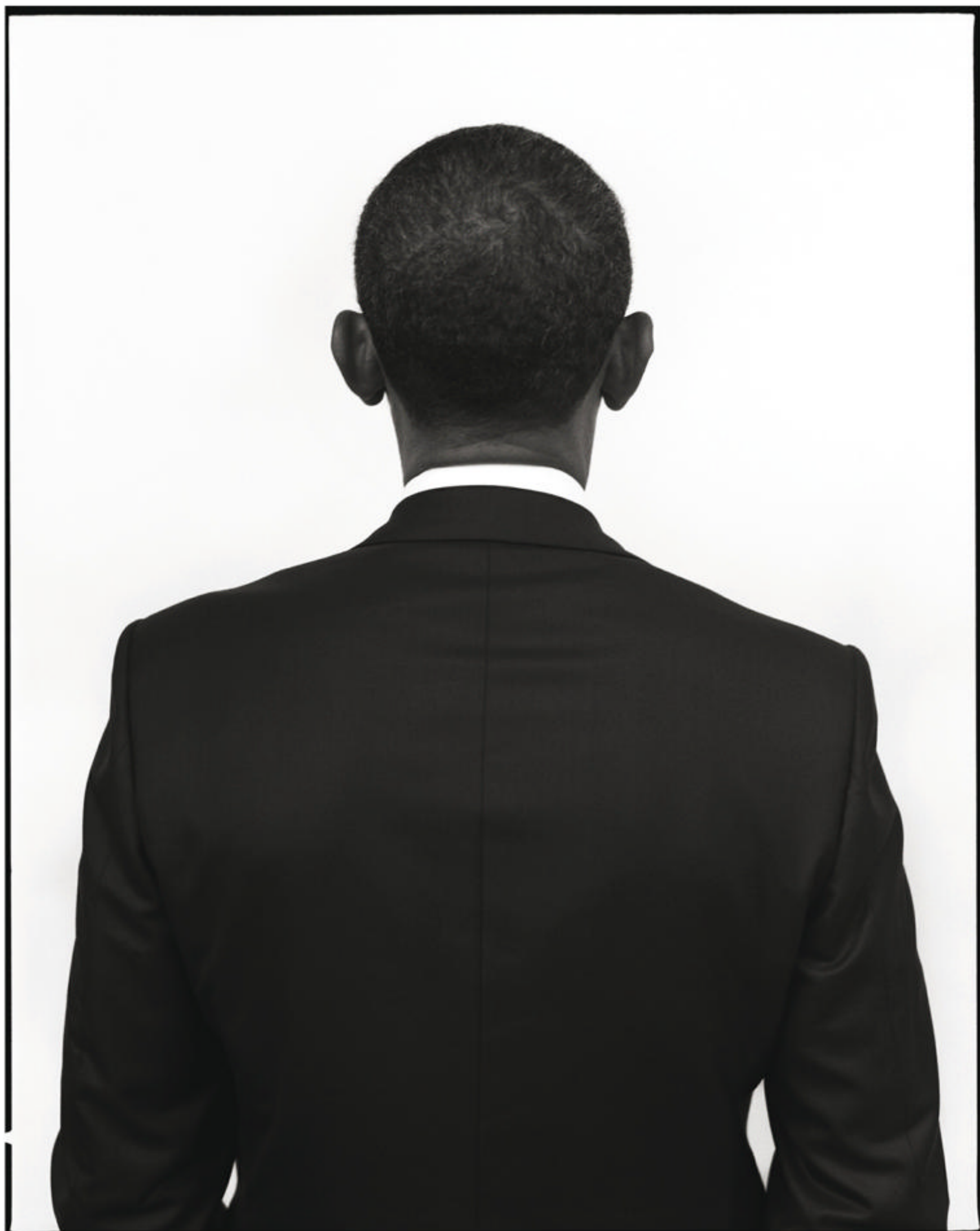
Kratochvil says she's noticed the shift in his shooting over the past 10 years and ascribes it to an increasing confidence and the calm that generates. "I think he feels a lot more secure about stripping away all the razzamatazz and getting

**Opposite: Barack Obama for *Rolling Stone*, The White House, Washington, D.C., 2010.**

down to basics," she says. "I think he felt a need to make his pictures simpler—when he did that they got even stronger."

Seliger recalls when his thinking about the *Listen* photos gelled. On an unseasonably warm New Year's Day he was out near his studio when a fog began rolling in around the pylons of a disused pier on the Hudson: "I was just standing there with my Toyo 4x5 looking at the scene unrolling in front of me as the fog was changing. I was watching it very quietly, only shooting every 15 seconds or so. When I looked behind me there were 10 people there. It really affected me that we were all watching the same thing, and it made me want to go and search out these photographs. I thought if these people were enjoying the same thing I was enjoying, it would make a great photographic project."

Close up, Seliger's platinum/palladium prints have a luminous, tactile, almost three-dimensional quality, as if the viewer might walk into them. This is not the kind of work that just happens. It is the product of an artist whose primary goal is not to impress, or even to express, but to grow. His focus has remained constant, not on the surfeit of accolades he's inspired or his financial well-being, but on working as hard as he can while also letting go. It requires that most delicate balance of relaxed attention, maintaining what Zen students call "beginner's mind." Where others might feel they have arrived, as far as Mark Seliger is concerned, the journey still very much lies ahead. "He's still as curious, still as hungry, as he was when I first met him in 1987," says longtime collaborator (and *GQ* design director) Fred Woodward. "He's still most excited about the *next* picture." **AP**





# In the Bag

The equipment it takes to shoot a show

BY MIRIAM LEUCHTER



**I**'m a music fan," says photographer Ian Witlen. As a kid wading into the crowd at punk and pop-punk shows with a camera in his hand, "never in a million years did I think I'd have the chance to work in the business." Yet that's how this South Florida-based pro (thecameraclicks.com), whose background is in photojournalism, makes his living now—not just with editorial portraits but with arresting in-your-face images that capture the visceral energy of live acts in venues from tiny clubs to big outdoor festivals. And, like many other pros, he also still shoots for his own pleasure, as a fan.

That distinction is important, because professional photographers, when they're on assignment (and sometimes when off duty), get access and opportunities at live shows that the audience does not. They can bring in more gear or different types of gear than ticket buyers are usually permitted, and they often command vantage points the crowd can't reach. At the same time, when covering live performances on assignment, especially big acts, pros often find themselves subject to limitations—confined to a designated area for photographers ("the pit") and afforded only one to three songs to get the shots they need.

**Above:** What camera to use for live music depends on the size of the venue, your access to the band, and what you can get away with.

But whether shooting for clients or for yourself, the choice of what camera, lenses, and other gear to bring boils down to three factors: the size of the venue, how close you can get to the stage, and the size and style of cameras the artist or venue permits you to use.

## Really Big Shows

Nowhere in concertdom is the divide between professional photographers on assignments and fans in seats more apparent than at large arena shows. Not only is the vast majority of the audience far from the stage, but the artists and their managers put different restrictions on photographers in terms of what and when they can shoot.

While pros with the right access might lug in a full-frame DSLR and a host of lenses, ordinary ticket buyers are limited by house rules—or even the whim of whoever's checking bags at the gate. It's crucial to learn the ground rules in advance. Never assume that a rig permitted at one show will be allowed at another, even at the same venue, regardless of size. "The venue goes along with the artist's wishes," says New York-based photographer Ryan Muir (ryanmuir.com), whose evocative image of LCD Soundsystem's final show at Madison



Above: LCD Sound-system's last show at Madison Square Garden in New York City, 2011, by Ryan Muir. Right: A Giant Dog at their Panache Booking Showcase at Beerland in Austin, TX, shot by Ian Witten on assignment for *Rolling Stone* at SXSW, 2014.





Square Garden in 2011 is on page 59. He got this dramatic side angle from the photographers' pit, a no-go zone for the audience, using a 35mm f/1.8G DX Nikkor on a Nikon D700 body (he recently switched to the D750).

Muir's favorite shots give more of a sense of the relationship between performers and fans, but at a big show it can be tough to get them in the same frame. "I like making sense of chaos," he says, "but the bigger the act, and the bigger the venue, the more separation there is between the artist and the crowd." Getting them together demands an ultra-wide-angle lens. "If the scale of the audience is especially vast—think EDM [electronic dance music]—I may throw a fisheye on top of a monopod and shoot from above with a delayed timer. It depends on how I previsualize the show and what elements are important to capture any given night."

When on assignment, Muir generally brings a bag full of Nikon equipment, including a second body as emergency backup. His favorite zooms are the 17–35mm f/2.8D and the 80–200mm f/2.8D. Besides simply providing telephoto reach in a big arena, he says, "it can be useful for flattening space across the front edge of a wide stage to compose

artists together who may be standing several feet apart—I call this 'raking'—or to punch into someone at the back, perhaps the drummer. If you're patient, it's also useful for catching clean close-up expressions from the side as artists turn away from the microphone in between singing moments."

In between these two optics, he packs a 35mm f/1.8G, 50mm f/1.4D, and 85mm f/1.4G; he might also bring along a Lensbaby or fish-eye, depending on the act. Actually, his version of the 35mm is a DX-format lens, made for cameras with APS-C sensors, which he uses on his full-frame camera. "This is one of my secret weapons for low-light concert photography," Muir says. "It focuses fast and accurately, but there is significant vignetting in daylight—so I only use this lens wide open in dark rooms where you typically can't even notice the darkened corners. Because it's cheap—\$200—I don't mind beating it up. I've replaced it three times rather than get it repaired. It really is capable of a unique look." In fact, his LCD Soundsystem photo was taken with this lens.

Witlen, too, brings a big bag of gear to large shows when he is working either in the pit or from the soundboard, another typical position for pros. A Canon shooter, he uses both the EOS 5D Mark III and the older Mark II. His typical kit includes Canon's 14mm f/2.8L, original 16–35mm f/2.8, 28mm f/2.8 IS, 50mm f/1.2L, 85mm f/1.2L, and 70–200mm f/2.8L IS EF lenses. He also always brings along a beloved old Sigma 24mm f/2.8 AF Super Wide II from his film days, which works with his digital cameras only at f/2.8; when his first one finally broke, he immediately replaced it with one he bought on eBay.

"Because lighting designers like to use so much purple and red, I like to shoot no higher than ISO 800," Witlen says. These colors often prove particularly subject to image noise at higher sensor sensitivities. But with the 5D Mark III, he can shoot at up to ISO 6400 and still get images clean enough to suit his style.

Of course, few photographers can get away with hauling all that gear into a big venue. Ticket holders can expect to be screened, and carrying a DSLR or even an interchangeable-lens compact camera, even without extra lenses, may be forbidden. In cases like this, an advanced compact with a good sensor and telephoto zoom makes the most sense. Top choices include the Panasonic Lumix LX100, with a Four Thirds sensor and 24–75mm (full-frame equivalent) f/1.7–2.8 lens, and the Sony Cyber-shot RX100 III, with a 1-inch sensor and 24–70mm (equivalent) f/1.8 lens. Both of these cameras have nice built-in electronic viewfind-



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### Getting Personal

At smaller venues, the rules are very different. Wide-angle and normal focal lengths predominate—who needs a telephoto lens when you can get up close? Even when they're working a midsize concert hall, the pros we spoke with try to get into the crowd.

This often means shooting with a smaller, more discreet camera than usual. Muir, for example, often uses a Sony Alpha a7S and sets it for an entirely silent shutter, a boon in intimate club settings. He also enjoys using his Fujifilm X100S, with its fixed 35mm lens. "It's not about being secretive," he says. "But I like not to be ostentatious. The last thing I want to be is distracting or in the way of people who are there to enjoy the music."




If he's using his Nikon D750, Muir may pack only his 35mm and 85mm primes, and then just pick the ideal position for both the show and the focal length. "It's an attitude more than the size of the camera—I don't want to be the guy who ruins it for the person standing in back of me."


Like Muir, Witlen always brings a camera,

even when he buys a ticket and enjoys the show like any other fan. Of course, it helps that he's already on good terms with concert producers such as Live Nation and with the publicists for the bands he likes. But for these shows, often at smaller venues, he usually keeps his 14mm on his camera and slips Canon's little 40mm f/2.8 STM pancake lens into his pocket. "I'm shocked that a lens this size can be so sharp, fast, and quiet," he says. "And it takes a beating."

In fact, having gear that can take abuse is a must for any photographer who gets into the action. "If you saw what my 14mm looked like!" Witlen says with a laugh. "The lens hood is dented and scratched, though it doesn't interfere with my field of view."

Asked how he got those battle scars, he describes following the hardcore band Gallows in 2009 as they hopped a barricade to play amid the throng. "I was shooting the lead singer as he lifted his mic stand—it hit the lens hood. In the same instant, the guitarist accidentally hit the lens hood with his guitar. I quickly assessed the lens to be fully functional and continued to shoot. The photo ended up becoming a double truck in the Soundselect section of *Spin*." **AP**





## MICHAEL SEMAAN ON SCHNEIDER B+W FILTERS

*"Atop a rock outcropping with my tripod dangling off the edge, I felt the spray of the waves as I calculated the exposure in my head. I knew I wanted a deep depth of field, and to slow the action for a pillowy, cotton candy, cascade effect. I always carry a 3, 6 & 10-stop B+W ND. Between those values I can get the exposure I want. I added on the B+W Circular Polarizer, for a shot like this it makes the colors pop, and cuts through the waters surface glare."*

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## RESOLUTION RACE TO THE TOP

Canon EOS 5Ds and 5DsR

With these two entries to its popular EOS 5D line, Canon promises the highest pixel count of any full-frame (35mm-format) CMOS sensor—50.6 megapixels. Due to hit shelves in June, both are aimed at landscape photographers, commercial pros, and artists who plan to print on a large scale. Aside from the 5DsR's low-pass filter cancellation feature, the cameras are identical. Each uses a pair of Canon's fastest image processors: the Digic 6, to handle all that data. They take UHS-1 class memory cards, and a small RAW setting captures 12.4MB files when the full resolution is too much of a good thing. The cameras also add one-step mirror lockup that can be programmed for up to a two-second delay for critical stillness.

**BUY IT** \$4,000 (5Ds) and \$4,300 (5DsR), bodies only; [usa.canon.com](http://usa.canon.com)



## THE FAIREST DRIVE OF ALL

LaCie Mirror

Anyone who knows LaCie's rugged orange-edged drives may be surprised by this new portable hard disk drive. Clad in Gorilla Glass from Corning, it's both durable and highly reflective (great for narcissists, bad for avoiding fingerprints). Paired with an ebony stand, it makes a gorgeous style statement on a studio or office desk. It holds 1TB of password-protected data and connects through a USB 3.0 port. **BUY IT** \$280 (with stand); [lacie.com](http://lacie.com)



## BEST FACE FORWARD

Fujifilm X-A2

This latest addition to Fujifilm's X series sports a 3-inch LCD that flips up to face forward for better self-portraits. But this 16.3MP entry-level ILC promises some nice features for photographers who would rather stay behind the camera, too, such as in-camera RAW processing and built-in digital filters that mimic the looks of classic film stocks. Battery life has risen substantially from that of its predecessor, the X-A1. Two new kit lenses also hold appeal: The Fujinon XC

16–50mm f/3.5–5.6 OIS II can focus on subjects just under 6 inches (15cm) away; and Fujifilm claims up to a 3.5-stop benefit from the optical image stabilization on the XC 50–230mm f/4.5–6.7 OIS II. **BUY IT** \$550 with 16–50mm lens; [fujifilm.com](http://fujifilm.com)



## MIGHTIEST MITE

Lexar Professional 1000x microSD UHS-II cards and reader

What do many Android smartphones, action cameras, and drones have in common? They record files to tiny microSD cards. As more shooters rely on such devices, the card format has become a crucial tool. And with mammoth slow-motion and 4K video files coming out of cameras like the Sony Action Cam (opposite), shooters need a card speedy enough to keep up. Lexar is first to meet that need with its new line of microSD cards in the ultrafast UHS-II (U3) format. Available in capacities of 32GB, 64GB, and 128GB, they come with a UHS-II USB 3.0 reader for read speeds that Lexar claims will hit 150MB per second—so you can spend less time offloading files and more time making pictures.

**BUY IT** \$50–\$150, depending on capacity; [lexar.com](http://lexar.com)



## OPTICAL SLIMDOWN

### Nikon AF-S Nikkor 300mm f/4E PF ED VR

Sports and wildlife photographers are used to lugging around huge super-telephoto lenses, but who wouldn't want to shave a few pounds off their load? With an optical design Nikon calls Phase Fresnel (PF), this full-frame 300mm f/4E PF tele is just over half the weight of the company's traditional 300mm f/4D IF-ED version. Even better: Nikon has added its Vibration Reduction image stabilization system and chopped 3 inches off the length. With similarly broad front elements, both versions take 77mm filters. Similar to the 400mm f/4 Diffraction Optic lens from Canon reviewed on page 64, this PF Nikkor bends the light entering the barrel first outward and then back inward to shorten the distance it must travel to the camera's sensor. Adding VR makes this lens a much better option for off-the-tripod shooting. **BUY IT** \$2,000; [nikonusa.com](http://nikonusa.com)

## PIXEL SHIFTER

### Olympus OM-D E-M5 II

Making use of its five-axis image stabilization system, this update of Olympus's original OM-D interchangeable-lens compact does something unusual to boost image resolution: It shifts the 16MP sensor half a pixel at a time during a set of eight frames, then combines the shots into one big 40MP-equivalent file. So far, the only photographers to gain from this kind of technology have been Hasselblad shooters squeezing 200MP images from the H5D-200c. But this up-res technique is likely to catch on among other camera makers. In the meantime, the E-M5 II provides plenty of other enticements to serious photographers, including weather sealing, burst shooting of up to 10 frames per second, maximum shutter speed of 1/8000 sec, and a sharp and fast 2.36 million-dot electronic viewfinder. **BUY IT** \$1,100; [olympusamerica.com](http://olympusamerica.com)



## SOLID BACKUP

### Samsung T1 SSD

If you're looking for a small drive for backing up photos and video, Samsung's new T1 provides a pricey solution. Available in 250GB, 500GB, and 1TB capacities, it boasts a 450MB per second data transfer speed, Samsung says, thanks to its USB 3.0 port. Since it measures just 2.8x2.0x0.4 inches and weighs less than an ounce, you might worry about losing the device. In case that happens, Samsung has equipped the T1 with hardware-based AES 256-bit encryption with password protection. One thing not to worry about: shaking or dropping it—it's a solid state drive, without the vulnerability of a hard disk drive's moving parts. **BUY IT** \$180-\$569; [samsung.com](http://samsung.com)



## FLEXIBLE FIXER

### Wacom Cintiq Companion 2

This follow-up to Wacom's tablet computer-based touch- and pen-based image editing platform can be had in five different versions, depending on the processor you choose. All of them run on Microsoft Windows 8, though you can now plug one into any computer, even a Mac, that has an HDMI port. The screen's pixel resolution is 2560x1440; connections include three USB 3.0 ports, SD and MicroSD card slots, and a mini-DisplayPort output. Wacom increased the number of ExpressKeys to six from the four found on the original Cintiq Companion. **BUY IT** \$1,300-\$2,700; [wacom.com](http://wacom.com)



## VIDEO TO THE MAX

### Sony 4K Action Cam X1000V

Tiny, rugged cameras seem to get more and more popular by the day. Sony's latest, the X100V, adds 4K recording for more detail in videos of your death-defying feats. Since the antics will likely result in a whoosh of air hitting the X100V's built-in stereo microphone, there's a wind-noise reduction feature to keep sonic distraction at bay. Sony also claims to have improved upon the electronic SteadyShot image stabilization compared to previous models. **BUY IT** \$500; [store.sony.com](http://store.sony.com)



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Gear HANDS ON

# Flare Fighter

Canon updates its most compact supertele **BY STAN HORACZEK**



**P**hotographers not intimately familiar with  
Canon's bevy of super-telephoto prime lenses  
may think the green stripe toward the front of  
the barrel of the company's new EF 400mm f/4 DO  
IS II USM looks a little odd. Surely it's supposed to be  
red, right? But this isn't a typical piece of L-series  
professional-grade glass—it's a long-awaited update  
to a rather unique lens.

The DO in the lens name stands for Diffractive  
Optics, a technology that Canon has been using in its  
quirky 400mm lens for more than a decade. This  
arrangement of the internal elements changes the  
path of light traveling through the lens barrel, allowing  
for an overall package that's substantially smaller and  
lighter than the typical telephoto bazooka.

The shrink ray, however, does not come without  
side effects. The spacing between the elements in the  
original version of this lens often led to more flare,  
adding to its reputation for low contrast overall. Canon  
seems to have addressed the lion's share of the flare is-  
sue with this new version. Yes, images still exhibit flare  
when shot directly into the sun, but the massive hood  
that Canon provides with the lens helps quite a bit.  
The contrast, while still not quite on par with the other  
premiere L-series primes, can no longer accurately be  
described as flat—neutral, maybe, but not flat, and  
neutral is often what photographers are looking for.

The lens has also shrunk noticeably, though it's still  
an extremely conspicuous piece of equipment. It weighs  
in at just over 4.6 pounds, but on a pro body the balance  
is excellent—the reduced length moves the center of

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10.83 feet (3.3 m)  
**IMAGE STABILIZATION** Rated up  
to 4 stops  
**FILTER SIZE** 52mm drop-in  
**BARREL LENGTH** 9.16 in.  
(232.7mm)  
**WEIGHT** 4.63 lb (2100 g)  
**BUY IT** \$6,900; [usa.canon.com](http://usa.canon.com)

gravity back toward the camera body. And compared with the 8-pound monster that is Canon's EF 400mm f/2.8L IS II, it feels manageable, even when shooting without a tripod or monopod. That's surprising for any supertele that comes with its own suitcase for transportation.

More important, Canon gave the image stabilization system a substantial upgrade, promising four stops (or more) of hand-holding leeway. There are a few shots in our test pool at 1/30 sec that are sharper than they have any business being. When you first activate it, though, the IS does feel a little slow, which most likely has something to do with the sheer size of the elements being moved around inside the barrel.

Like its bigger telephoto siblings, the lens has three distinct IS modes to choose from, including a traditional mode to counteract shake, one made specifically for panning, and a newer mode for tracking moving objects. That last situation is one in which photographers typically tend to eschew IS, but we were impressed with its ability to capture action shots without exhibiting the wobbly lag that sometimes comes with IS. In addition, in this mode IS doesn't have to be turned off when the lens is on a tripod.

Another new feature of the DO line is Power Focus, a shooting mode geared more toward filmmakers than still photographers. It's basically a way to pull focus in a smooth, variable-speed fashion by using electronic autofocus drive. While most filmmakers will probably stick to the old manual focus method, it certainly works in a pinch. And although it's nice to have, Power Focus will likely feel superfluous when used for still photography.

The front lens coating has been seriously enhanced, not only to better combat ghosting but also to actively fend off dust and every other kind of grime that would otherwise be instantly attracted to the massive front element. It even repels fingerprints, which made it a little nerve wracking to test.

One area where the new lens stutters a bit is in its ability to focus up close. The new f/4 DO just squeaks in under 11 feet, while the much bigger f/2.8 version checks in around 8.8 feet. Of course, photographers use a telephoto this long to shoot far away, but it's something to consider if you tend to get physically close to the action.

Despite its relatively small size, the lens still comes with the big price tag you'd

expect from a pro-grade supertele. At \$6,900, it likely won't be showing up on the sidelines of many Pee Wee football games, but for travel-hardened sports, adventure, or nature photographers, diffractive optics could be a real boon. (Canon isn't the only one doing this: Nikon's latest 300mm lens, announced earlier this year, uses a similar technology called Phase Fresnel.) Whatever their moniker, smaller, sharper lenses will appeal to anyone trying to cram long lenses into overhead compartments or shoot with them for hours in the field. Ultimately, Canon's EF 400mm f/4 DO IS II is an upgrade in just about every possible way. **AP**

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# EDEN AND AFTER

Carolyn Drake's assignment on Iraqi Marsh Arabs never made it to press—until now **BY EUGENE REZNIK**



**I**n 2012, after American troops' initial withdrawal from Iraq, *National Geographic* sent Carolyn Drake on a four-week assignment to document the repopulation by Marsh Arabs of the country's southern wetlands. This desert oasis, which biblical scholars link to the Garden of Eden, was nearly wiped out by Saddam Hussein in the 1990s when he drained the marshes and bombed villages in retaliation for a Shia uprising. After the U.S. invasion in 2003, the displaced began breaking holes in Hussain's levees to revive the marshes, now 40 to 50 percent restored.

Drake sent back a large portfolio. Her photo of two of her subjects cutting reeds in Hammar Marsh (right) was chosen for the story's opening spread, but in the end her photos never ran at all. As many magazines do, *Nat Geo* made the assignment far in advance of publication and held on to the story for several months. Then in 2014, the security situation in Iraq unraveled; with American armed forces on their way back to Baghdad, *Nat Geo* decided not to publish it. "I was disappointed, but these things happen," Drake says. "There's tons of work that never gets published or never gets to an audience, but the process of making it leads me and my work somewhere I wouldn't have gotten to otherwise."

We're happy to finally show that work here. Editors, short on space, often go for photos like the one of the reed cutters

here: clear, direct, and graphic—it tells many parts of the story at once. But as a photographer, Drake often prefers shots that don't make the final cut. That was the case with this photo of an artist painting the marsh. "I am also drawn to simpler, stranger pictures that the editor might see as tangential to the story," she says, "ones in which the story is clouded, or that reflect on the story, or introduce odd details and deviations from the story more than they *tell* the story." These more ambiguous frames reflect the complexity of the issues she covers, leaving her audience plenty of room for interpretation. **AP**

**Above:** An artist from Baghdad paints the marshes. **Right:** Cutting reeds in the morning with Taleb and Umm Karrar in Hammar Marsh. See more by Drake at [AmericanPhotoMag.com](http://AmericanPhotoMag.com).



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